

INSIDE THE SEA DRAGON: THE GENERATIONS WITHIN THE
CURRENT PEOPLES LIBERATION ARMY NAVY
OFFICER CORPS

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War Scholars

by

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ABSTRACT

INSIDE THE SEA DRAGON: THE GENERATIONS WITHIN THE CURRENT PEOPLES LIBERATION ARMY NAVY OFFICER CORPS, by LT Brian Juskiewicz, 147 pages.

Karl Mannheim's definition of social generations is used to analyze the current Peoples Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) Officer Corps. Using a combination of existing quantitative and qualitative information, three social generations are distinguished based on the officer's approximate date of entry into the PLAN. Although this thesis is rooted in social science, several chapters are necessarily a selective historical survey of the PLAN focused upon those events that are expected to be impactful on their future mindset. Predictions of possible future trajectories or opinions of particular generations is omitted to reduce possible bias. A brief historical overview of the PLAN over the last century is also provided to establish context before analyzing the present PLAN.

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ACRONYMS

CMC	Central Military Committee
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army
PLAN	Peoples Liberation Army Navy
PME	Professional Military Education
PRC	Peoples Republic of China
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: AN EMERGING CHINESE NAVY

Finally, it must be remembered that, among all changes, the nature of man remains much the same; the personal equation, though uncertain in quantity and quality in the particular instance, is sure always to be found.¹

— A. T. Mahan

The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783

As United States involvement in the two wars in the Middle East was drawing down in late 2011, President Barrack Obama directed a strategic shift in United States priorities to the Pacific.² Although the Pacific Ocean is the largest body of water in the world with many bordering nations, the motivation for the shift is widely accepted as pre-positioning the United States against a rising China.³ Any change in the strategic landscape requires significant analysis, but a rising major power makes this effort particularly acute. The looming threat of a Thucydides Trap mandates nothing less.⁴

¹ Alfred T Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*, 12th ed. (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1918), 89.

² Barrack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” accessed September 10, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.

³ Anthony Cordesman, Ashley Hess, and Nicholas Yarosh, *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: A Western Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013), 24-27.

⁴ The Thucydides Trap is a common use term that refers to Thucydides’ opinion that Athens rise, in power compared to Sparta, “made war inevitable.” Accordingly, the trap is the idea that all declining powers fight the rising powers. See Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 2008), sec. 1.23.

Accordingly countless authors, policymakers, and academics on both sides of the Pacific have written, discussed, and held conferences in attempts to predict the trajectories of Chinese efforts. These efforts have resulted in strong opinions and little agreement on what China desires for its actual strategic endstate, let alone what the United States should or can do in response to the trends.

The scale of the efforts across the world's think-tanks and academic institutions is monumental. A recent book reviewer that focuses on Chinese issues, referred to as a "China Watcher", remarked truthfully that "there are too many books to choose from; many of us simply don't have the time to read, let alone think about many of these issues."⁵

This thesis therefore will take an alternate approach to understanding China and its interactions in the Pacific under several assumptions. First, writing on the capabilities, limitations, and strategic objectives of China without primary source access within China would add little to the well-developed strategic discussion on China. Second, this author believes that the number of variables changing at any given time is so great that only a general direction can be understood about China. Last, the magnitude of raw information available today is such that a full analysis of even a narrow topic requires significant analysis to be authoritative.

⁵ Christopher Nelson, review of *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry*, by Lyle Goldstein, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 78 (July 2015): 127-28.

As President Obama stated, the strategic shift is to the Pacific: not Asia, not North Korea, and not just China.⁶ It is only appropriate then to take a different approach than most contemporary works by focusing on the niche group of Chinese people who operate above, on, and beneath the Pacific itself. Although their platforms and objectives may change, Chinese naval officers are a distinct group of people who are a product of their past; a past that cannot be altered and therefore can be understood.

By focusing on the people and their past experiences, we can start to understand the broad mindset of contemporary Chinese naval officers as they enter into problems. This can then be used as a foundation for subsequent detailed analysis or stand alone as an informative work.

Research Questions

The Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) can be analyzed through many different models and analysis methods that focus on different aspects of the organization. Focusing on the current PLAN officers, a sociology model that employed the concept of changing generations was selected to unwrap the complexities of their experiences. Generational models reinforce the transformational aspect of the past several decades and reminds a reader that a nation is not a monolith. Although there is a general direction to China, each new group of people who take power alter it slightly based on their experiences which are often far into their past.

Research for this thesis was narrowed in time and scope to ensure immediate relevancy to a reader wanting to better understand PLAN officers in uniform today. With

⁶ Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament.”

these concepts in mind, a series of questions were formed to guide the research into the PLAN: Do social generations exist within the current PLAN officer corps? If so, what events are specific to PLAN officers that impact their generation in comparison to the PLA or China as a whole? How have these differences been received and resolved when applicable?

The decision to specifically look at only the officers within the Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is intentional. Unlike land forces, the smallest unit of maneuver in a navy is an airplane, ship, or submarine and in almost every scenario an officer leads it. Although PLAN enlisted personnel contribute to mission accomplishment and operational readiness, they seldom operate at the ship-wide tactical, operational, strategic, or the broadly political levels. Furthermore, PLAN officers that hold senior billets make or at least contribute to the strategic and operational decisions of the entire Chinese Communist Party.⁷ Therefore, a balanced view into the PLAN can be achieved when viewing only the officers within the PLAN or those outside the PLAN that have had direct impacts on its officers.

The end of the Cultural Revolution (1976) was chosen as the starting date for detailed analysis of the PLAN for several reasons. First, the PLAN underwent notable changes during the Cultural Revolution. Understanding the Cultural Revolution is critical

⁷ ADM Wu Shengli, the current PLAN Commander, is a member of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and the Central Committee (CC); and therefore has impact on strategic military decisions. Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015).

for those observing China, but the magnitude of changes during this period were so great that its conclusion can be considered a baseline from which to analyze future events. Second, with few exceptions, only the most senior of current PLAN officers were in the PLA during the Cultural Revolution and this work is written to be relevant to the current PLAN.⁸ Finally, the amount of information and discussion available to academics increases significantly in the years following the Cultural Revolution allowing better understanding based on primary and secondary sources. As China exited the Cultural Revolution, it rapidly entered onto the world stage and therefore its works were translated and analyzed in far greater detail than before.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is formatted to be a self-contained work that progressively builds upon itself and develops the reader's knowledge in both PLAN history and how it affected its officers. Figure 1 provides an overview of this flow and demonstrates how the different chapters ultimately contribute to the conclusion chapter which summarizes the supporting chapters and answers the aforementioned research questions. Of note, chapters 2 and 4 are not shown directly flowing into the conclusion since they are foundational chapters in both previous literature and establishing a historical footing in China's naval officer history. Chapter 3 introduces the sociology aspects of social generations and what elements are needed to define a social generation. Ultimately four of the five attributes

⁸ A majority of the PLA(N) officers within the Navy Party Standing Committee entered the service in approximately 1975 and represent the most senior of all officials in the PLA(N). Ibid., 36-40.

required are resolved in chapter 3, with the final attribute consuming chapters 5, 6, and 7 due to its role in answering one of the secondary questions.

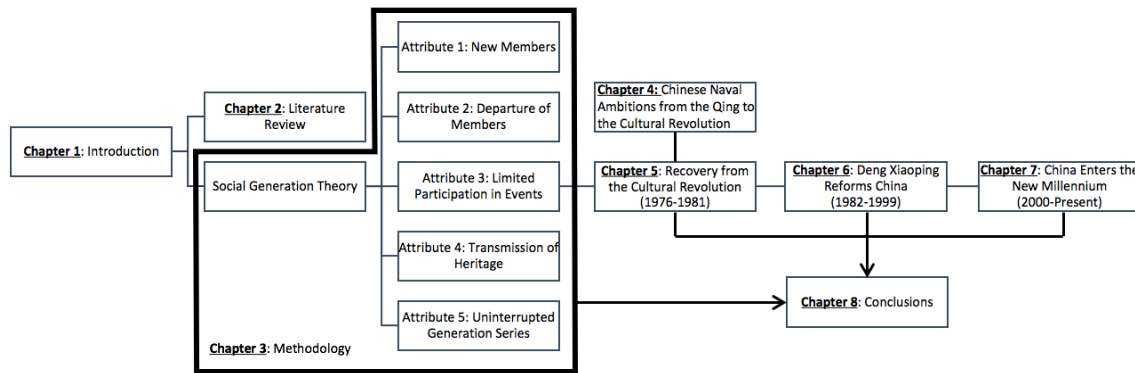


Figure 1. Overall Thesis Structure

Source: Created by author.

Directly entering into the events following the Cultural Revolution is difficult without a foundation in PLAN experiences over the past century. The period up to the Cultural Revolution is outside the scope of analysis, but a foundational prologue is included in chapter 4 to provide a better flow and provide a foundation for readers who do not specialize in the PLAN.

Relevance to Today

China is an emerging power on the international stage by every measure to include diplomatic, economic, and military capabilities. As stated before, this thesis will not attempt to predict the trajectory of this rise and how it will impact other nations. This could be misinterpreted as a lack of desire or willingness to do this next logical step. The

value of this thesis is not to the pure pragmatist who desires a summary chart of what is on the horizon. The value is in the concept that understanding a group of people can bear fruit indirectly and in ways not always perceivable.

The account of Medal of Honor recipient Rear Admiral Richard O’Kane during his transit to a Japanese war prison during the Second World War has haunted my mind for years and was a bedrock in my drive into shaping this thesis about the people in the PLAN. I believe within the short passage that follows is a testament to understanding more than just the weapons and systems of war a nation has. Having recently been blown off the bridge of his submarine after unleashing a devastating attack on Japanese merchant shipping, the submarine captain (O’Kane) is taken prisoner and transported onboard a destroyer to mainland Japan. He is quartered in the destroyer captain’s room for the voyage to the prison. The following is an extract of the exchange between the Japanese captain and O’Kane:

I had been provided shoes, warm clothes, and meals on time, but the captain’s first visit did not come until after dark. The discussions that followed ranged from naval tactics to literature. He correctly did not believe that a battleship confrontation was now possible but then changed the subject, asking, “How is it, Commander, that you speak no Japanese but seem to understand my English?” I answered truthfully that when I was at the Naval Academy, Japanese language was not taught, but that had since changed. The captain turned his palms up and said with feeling, “How could we expect to understand each other’s problems when you made no attempt to learn even a word of our language?” When discussing literature—and I wished I had been better read—he reached to his bookshelf and brought down a copy of *Gone with the Wind*, saying “You recognize Mitchell’s *Went with the Breeze*,” and expressed the opinion that if most influential adults had read this book, our nations might have found a solution to the problems and avoided this war.⁹

⁹ Richard O’Kane, *Clear the Bridge!* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 447.

I do not believe widespread reading of a few extra books could have avoided the Second World War for the United States; reasons existed beyond a cultural misunderstanding, but I do believe people with influence need to understand the rising powers beyond the tables of weapons systems and extrapolated charts of gross domestic product. At the same time, it is all too easy to paint a group of people in the light of an enemy or a future ally due to biases and selective imagery. Every endeavor has been made to avoid bias in either direction and present only the facts and let the reader come to their own conclusions. This thesis was envisioned in its early drafts as a foundation for a short pamphlet for United States Naval Officers on deployment to the Pacific who ask the question when looking at a nearby PLAN warship, “What shades their view of the world differently than mine?”

There will be no effort in this thesis to teach the reader Chinese traditions or induce the reader to learning the Chinese language; it will present key events in a way that is hopefully relatable to the average American military officer. The PLAN officer corps can certainly speak and read English today, perhaps we should make an effort to at least understand their lives a little.

Chinese Language Use

To ensure the widest possible audience of English readers, non-toned pinyin was used for all Chinese names and locations in this thesis. Pinyin (拼音) literally means “spoken-out sounds” and can be considered a phonetical means of using the Latin alphabet to make sounds similar to what a reader of Chinese characters (汉字) would have said if reading aloud. It is commonly used without any accents on its Latin

characters when used in largely English language works such as this. For reference, the toned form of writing pinyin such as that expected of Chinese students is “pīnyīn” with the markings indicating the tones.

A reader can recognize “Mao Zedong” and understand who is being discussed when it is written in non-toned pinyin, but his actual name of 毛泽东 is far more difficult to recognize correctly and less awkward than its toned version of Máo Zédōng.

Depending on the date of the translation, the pinyin may also differ slightly in its spelling with many period pieces reviewed in this research referring to Mao as Mao Tse-tung.

Further complicating the matter is that there are two forms of Chinese characters, traditional and simplified (which all the above characters are). Accordingly, non-toned pinyin is used as the only means of communicating names and locations from China in all further pages.

The final Chinese language specific element that requires acknowledgement is the order of a person’s name and its use in English works. Again taking Mao Zedong as the example, Mao is actually his surname—what would often be considered the last name. Zedong represents who he is within the Mao family, a first name. Most works still treat the name in the order of first name then last name for the purposes of citing and discussing people’s roles in the narrative portion of a work. This is further complicated when a given author with a Chinese name chooses to inverse their name in selected works, such as Cheng Li who is cited several times within this thesis. In some of his works, he writes it as Li Cheng but is the same person. To ensure consistency and correctly identifying other authors to their current wishes, the most recently used name layout is used when this occurs.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A surprising lack of information exists on the *people* within the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) as a whole, let alone the PLAN. China as a country has been written on extensively with detailed analysis on quantitative changes within the country, e.g. numbers of battle tanks over time.¹⁰ There is a growing collection of works that go beyond the graphs and discuss professional military education and grade structures, but again fail to paint a full picture of the people within the PLAN. What little within academia that talks about the people is almost entirely limited to the key leadership within China as a whole, or the PLA in general. Only a very select group of works go further and describe the leadership within the PLAN and their unique perspectives.

The people in the PLAN consist of more than just the leaders at the top of the country. The elements required for a complete look into PLAN officers of all grades exists within the plethora of sources in academia, but are scattered across many books and embedded in often unrelated discussion points.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds through several discussions on existing literature on the PLAN and social generations within China. First, several concepts that vary depending on the authors social generation methodology are explained to better introduce both the current literature and this thesis's methodology chapter. The intent is

¹⁰ Michael Chase, *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 54, 78.

to provide a Rosetta Stone of sorts for generational works that became clear to this author only after many months of study on this topic. Omitting this discussion results in a thoroughly confused reader who cannot transition between existing works easily. Next, the key generational works are discussed that focus on China, the PLA, and the PLAN as appropriate. Finally, general literature on the PLAN, which provides much of the historical information, is discussed to complete the literature review.

Since this is largely a sociology work heavily reliant upon history, much of the in depth discussions on social generations are contained within the methodology section of this thesis, chapter 3. Furthermore, comparisons between existing literature and my conclusions for a particular generation are contrasted in the particular chapter on that generation, not here.

Chinese Social Generation Literature Unlocked

Most people understand the concept of a generation beyond the classic biological one of a parent and child. Terms such as “Millennial” and the “Baby Boomer” are in common use and describe broad groups of people that have shared experiences and roughly makeup a social generation. Looking at China, there are also generational terms used to refer to groups of people; but not in a unified nature that is simple to follow. Each author has decided to define their generations differently based on a multitude of reasons: what period in a person’s life is the anchor point; how detailed the author desires to be in generation differences; if the author was looking at China as a whole, all of the PLA, or just the PLAN; the year of publishing; and what the socio-political situation between China and the country of publication was.

Anchor Points

The first issue when reading existing literature of Chinese social generations is the idea of an anchor point. There are essentially three periods in a person's life that can be used to describe the same group of people yet results in different numerical dates of reference. Only if the anchor point is known, can generations across works be compared. The first possible anchor point is based on the year of birth for the group of people being referred to. The single child generation of China uses this birth anchor point and is focused on their date of birth related to a state policy as the reference. The second anchor point, and most commonly used for generational discussions, is that of the formative years of the subject group. A millennial is a person passing through their formative years following the immediate turn of the millennium and references the period in time they had their youthful experiences; they were not born in the new millennium. The final anchor point in common use, especially in academic works on the Chinese, is the elite generation anchor point. This is the point where the group of people rise to take the most senior of billets as the country's elite.

As a method to illustrate how critical understanding the anchor point is in deciphering existing social generation literature, Figure 2 was generated. This is a graphic representation of Admiral Wu Shengli, the current commander of the PLAN, and the three different anchor points that could be used based on his experiences and age. His generation is almost completely retired from the PLAN at this point, but he was used as the example due to his attainment of elite status and availability of records.

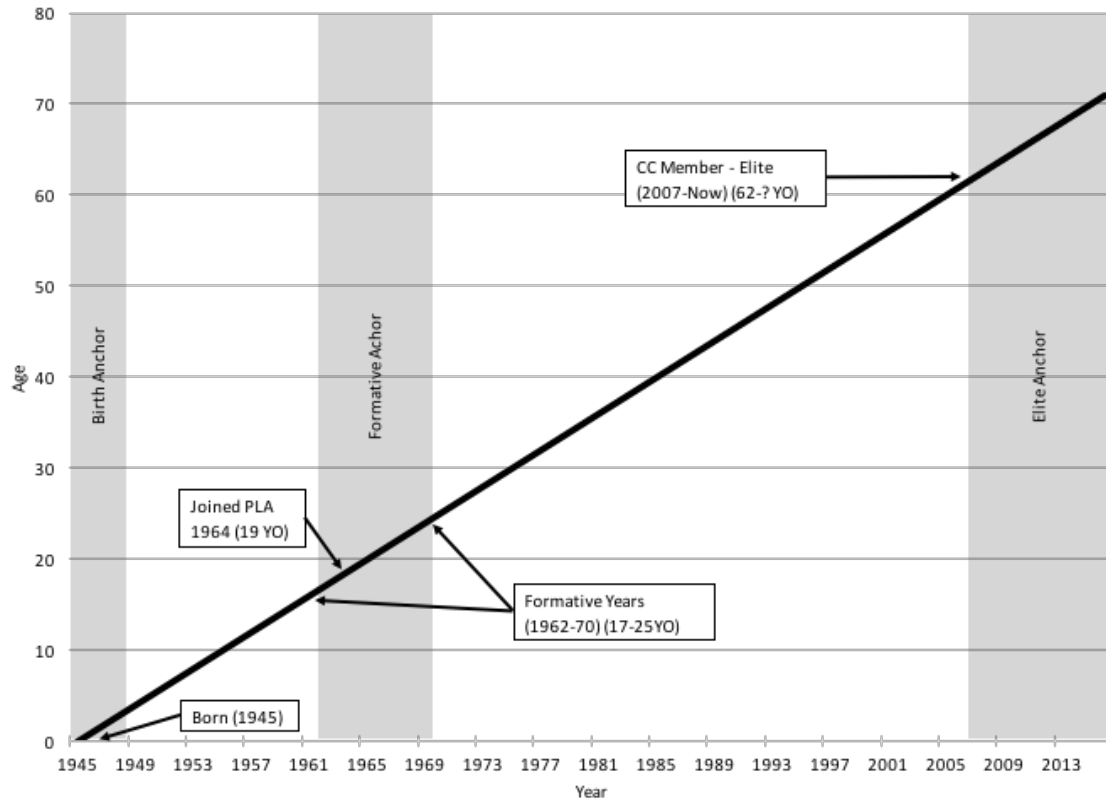


Figure 2. Wu Shengli's Anchor Points

Source: Graphic created by author. Dates from Cheng Li, “Wu Shengli 吴胜利,” The Brookings Institution, accessed September 26, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/china/top-future-leaders/wu_shengli.

Looking at Admiral Wu Shengli as presented in Figure 2, we can see that he was born in 1945. Therefore, if the birth anchor point was used, the 1945 date is that which would be used to discuss the group of people in his age range. The formative anchor shown between 17 and 25 years old and translated to a year band based on the date of birth is next shown. As is consistent of most all PLA members, Admiral Wu Shengli entered the PLA during this band and at the early end of it. Therefore, if we want to discuss his generation in terms of the formative anchor, we would use a date range of 1962 to 1970.

The final anchor is that which represents when the generation was old enough to take on the key leadership roles of the country, the elites. Of course most members of a society are not elites, but when used for social generations it discusses a group of people who had unified experiences in their youth but are now in leadership roles based typically on present dates. This band is even larger than the two earlier anchor points as the relatability of the elite band to a birth year is reduced due to the many complex factors of rising to power. Broadly, Admiral Wu Shengli's elite anchor is about 2005 to the present which again refers to the same group of people and their youthful experiences. Therefore, depending on the anchor, we can define Admiral Wu Shengli's anchor with the following bands depending on our reference point as 1945, 1962 to 1970, or 2007 to the present. Understanding the anchor point and ensuring works being compared are in common terms, or manually converting them as needed, is therefore important.

Generation Size

The second concept that is important when looking at a generational model is understanding the size each generation should be. This is partly in the eye of the beholder and therefore is partially subject to the authors intended thesis. The smaller the band of people being discussed (for example a 5-year band vs. a 15-year band), the more granularity can be achieved when discussing the subject groups. This requires more generations to be defined however and can become burdensome for a reader to keep track of. The balance is to achieve a sufficient number of generations that shows the desired transitions while being true to the nature of events.

As an example, one extremely detailed and well written book from 1973 details eleven different generations in the PLA from 1923 to its publishing (50 year span).¹¹ The author, Whitson, used a generational concept that is similar to what is used in this thesis and emerged with a generational change approximately every four years. Although far shorter of an interval than most generational works, its conclusions hold up when viewed in light of the extreme turmoil of the subject period. The type of events and their impact on a person's mindset in this period includes: the initial founding of the Red Guards, the five encirclement campaigns, the Long March, the Japanese Invasion, the Chinese Civil War, and the Korean War to highlight only a few easily recognizable ones.

It is also possible to have practically no distinguishable generations, or ones with very mild differences in periods of relative calm and little change.¹² If the life experiences of two groups of people, albeit separated by a relatively long period of time, are nearly identical then it is possible that no distinguishable pattern can be identified. An example of this could be agricultural life in periods of relative calm many centuries ago. There may be no distinguishable generations except over very long periods of time due to the stability of the world and slow rate of technological and social change.

As mentioned, specific works have been published that attempt to identify generations specific to China. Generally, these academic works overlap in at least one area, that the Cultural Revolution caused a change in generations. This author has

¹¹ William Wallace Whitson and Chen-hsia Huang, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 416-435.

¹² Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti, 2nd Impression (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 310-311.

compiled a comparison of the Chinese generation works into Figure 3. The chart is of limited value this early in this thesis, but is shown to illustrate the variance in the sizes of generations and when transitions happened. It is critical to understand each piece's conclusions is a product of the author's vantage point to include: if they were looking at China as a whole, all of the PLA, the PLAN, the year of publishing, and the current socio-political situation between China and the country of publication. Furthermore, the dates being referred to are based on the formative anchor point previously discussed. Although many of these works also discuss the period of their rise to elite status, the formative anchor is used to allow discussion across the works in common terms.

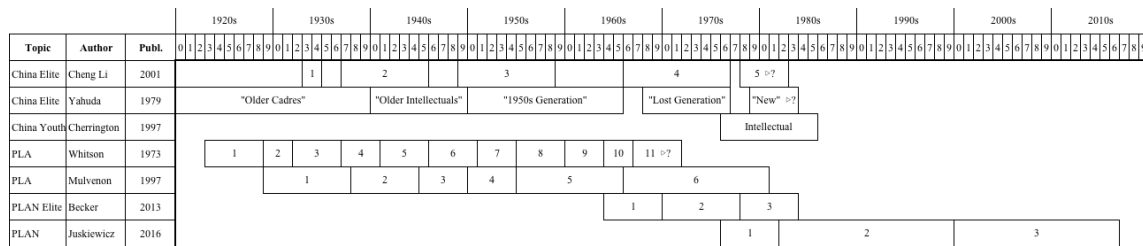


Figure 3. Existing Chinese Generation Literature

Source: Graphic created by author. Content derived from: Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2013); Ruth Cherrington, "Generational Issues in China: A Case Study of the 1980s Generation of Young Intellectuals," *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (June 1997): 302–20; Cheng Li, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001); James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications* (Washington, DC: RAND, 1997); William Wallace Whitson and Chen-hsia Huang, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Michael Yahuda, "Political Generations in China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 80 (December 1979): 793-805.

Not all pieces that cover Chinese social generations will be detailed in this review, as many are either almost entirely contained in subsequent works, are outside the period being reviewed, or take a very different approach to defining generations. Most were still reviewed in pursuit of this thesis to ensure a balanced approach however. Some will be discussed in the following section, and those that overlap this thesis's first generation are contained in chapter 5. For convenience, the content of Figure 3 is also provided in Appendix A as a stand-alone product and contains additional detail not possible in the narrative portion of this thesis.

Works on Generations Within China

The first published piece that described authoritatively the generations within China following the Cultural Revolution was Michael Yahuda's article in *The China Quarterly* of December 1979.¹³ Yahuda's thesis was that the Cultural Revolution and the fallout from it was a defining moment that allowed the young adults that endured it to be defined as a generation.¹⁴ Yahuda defined five generations within China in 1979 as follows:

Five broadly defined political generations may be identified: Those called in the Chinese press "the older cadres," who may be regarded as those who joined the Party or the army well before Liberation; those now called "the older intellectuals," that is those who received a higher education before 1949; those who completed their senior secondary school or tertiary education and who became cadres for the first time during the 1950s; those who are now called the "lost generation," that is those whose secondary and tertiary education took place

¹³ Michael Yahuda, "Political Generations in China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 80 (December 1979): 793-805.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 794.

during the Cultural Revolution (to these may be added those young people who received major political advancement during this period); and finally, the new generation approaching maturity in the post Cultural Revolution environment.¹⁵

The salient portion of Yahuda's work is his last generation, that which completed its education at the closing of the Cultural Revolution. Bringing this concept forward, this generation is currently approaching 65 years of age, the mandatory retirement age for all officers not CMC members.¹⁶ Therefore, Yahuda's last generation from his 1979 article represents the first generation within this thesis. I will not repeat his or other subsequent authors specific findings at this time as they will be covered as appropriate in chapter 5 of this thesis. However, this work is notable because it represents the starting point of applicable generational literature to this thesis.

Several academic works have been published between Yahuda's 1979 article and the 2001 book by Cheng Li titled *China's Leaders* but little value is added by allocating independent discussions for each; the 2001 book does an outstanding job summarizing all works on generations up to the turn of the millennium for China as a whole.¹⁷ Li also states that there are five generations of leadership in China and aligned the generations such that Yahuda's fourth and fifth generation (defined by the Cultural Revolution) overlapped Li's fourth and fifth generation. See figure 3. The fifth generation in the 2001

¹⁵ Ibid., 796.

¹⁶ James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications* (Washington, DC: RAND, 1997), 40.

¹⁷ Cheng Li, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

book is explained significantly beyond that of Yahuda due to 22 years of additional history to analyze. This generation largely represents the current leadership within China today.¹⁸ It is important to note the depth by which Li went to in defining his fourth generation in his book and how that is not achievable within this thesis. Li performed a quantitative analysis of vast amounts of biographical information from primary Chinese sources, analyzed several case studies of key leaders, and conducted a qualitative analysis almost entirely to describe a single generation.¹⁹ This qualitative thesis will be much more abbreviated than what which Li accomplished, citing works such as that completed by Li where possible, and will broadly cover three generations.

A portion of the 2001 book is also spent attempting to predict what defined the fifth generation and what its rise would mean for foreign and internal policies. In July 2008, Li published a lengthy article in *Asia Policy* that served to update portions of the 2001 book (which he refers to in several places) and extends the conversation specifically into diversity within what emerged as Hu Jintao's fifth generation of Chinese leadership.²⁰ Very little of the 2008 article discusses the PLAN and the people within it, but its format and flow for presenting generational changes in a format consistent with a thesis is excellent. The small corrections made in the 2008 article are helpful in framing Li's 2001 comprehensive look at Chinese generations within the political elite. Cheng

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Cheng Li, "China's Fifth Generation: Is Diversity a Source of Strength or Weakness?," *Asia Policy* 6 (July 2008): 53-93.

Li's two works are used in chapter 5 to support what this author will refer to as the First Generation in the present PLAN.

This thesis would be remiss to not acknowledge Mulvenon's brief discussions on generations within the PLA in his 1997 RAND study. His relatively brief generation narrative was a product of both him and an unpublished paper by Michael Swaine which based generations on "the dates of officer entry into the [Chinese Communist Party] and PLA," much like this thesis.²¹ Unfortunately, Michael Swaine stated in an e-mail to this thesis author dated 9 November 2015 that he was unable to find the original work and "did not continue that line of research." There were three generations in this work with indeterminate dates, but were analyzed quantitatively by Mulvenon through segments of time based on key events. These periods of time specified by Mulvenon are those that used in Figure 3 since it is not possible to know those of Swaine's lost work.

The next significant work on generations within China that is applicable to this thesis is the comprehensive study completed by the Center for Naval Analyses in 2013 titled *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy*.²² Led by Jeffrey Becker, this analysis was a deep-dive into the PLAN leadership of which no equal exists. At 290 pages, Becker defined three generations of elite leaders within the PLAN grouped by the year they joined the PLA. It is important to note that the three generations within this piece are fully limited to the senior leadership within the PLAN and does not extend down the ranks. Once a PLA officer is of sufficient grade, they are exempt from

²¹ Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps*, 49.

²² Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2013).

mandatory retirement ages and therefore a wide range of people can exist at the very top. This is true of those at the very top of the PLAN structure, enough so that the small group of leaders was divided into three social generations.

This author does not contest Becker's conclusion that three generations may be seen within the elite members of the PLAN. The definition of a social generation is amorphous and its bounds depend on the granularity desired by the author. Just as one can measure the length of a table in centimeter accuracy, they could also go to millimeters. Little is gained by extremely detailed analysis in most cases however. Becker's thesis was focused on the leadership only and accordingly it is appropriate for him to narrow in on that group of PLAN officers, but it is not for this thesis which is broader in its scope. Accordingly, this author omits some of the details that could further differentiate the first generation into more generations in order to present information in a broad manner. This author fully endorses a reader interested in additional detail in elite PLAN leadership generations read Becker's work as it is the current authoritative piece on this area.

Throughout development of this thesis, this author has attempted to verify that sufficient resources have been found and investigated. In several cases, this author has directly reached out to key authors of works that are within this bibliography after a detailed review of their bibliographies to help broaden this thesis's research scope. In all cases, it appears that few members of academia are researching or writing about the PLAN officer corps at levels below that of the key leadership. There are several snippets

throughout published works, but not a unifying narrative.²³ Simply put, most China-watchers focus on the key leaders in China (sometimes the PLA, rarely the PLAN) to understand if any strategic changes are on the horizon. The same methodologies used in the largely qualitative reviews of key Chinese leaders is equally applicable for this thesis. Therefore, this thesis will take the concepts and methods pioneered in other works for the elite generations and carry them down to all members of the PLAN officer corps.

Historical Sources on the PLAN

Although three decades have passed since its publishing, Bruce Swanson's 1982 book *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* provides the most comprehensive and accessible look into both the history and nature of the PLAN up to 1982. Written as a comprehensive Chinese Naval history, Swanson clearly details the people in the Chinese Navy and their origins—going so far as to even describe the “Political Groups in the Navy” in 1932.²⁴ Swanson was limited in his primary sources due to the cold war and the limited information availability, particularly those relating to Sino-Soviet relations. Therefore, contemporary histories on China's military such as Xiaobing Li's *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* were used to reinforce certain areas from Swanson's book.²⁵

²³ For an example, see comments on the current generation of PLA officers within China in Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner, eds., *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2008), 161.

²⁴ Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982).

²⁵ Xiaobing Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

A unique look into China's Navy was completed in 2007 by the Office of Naval Intelligence that does a great deal of unmasking of the people within the PLAN. This large publication was not designed to provide a narrative or present any particular thesis to the reader—its arguably a reference guide for United States military officers interacting with China. Some outstanding pieces of information exist in this document to include changes in pay over time to current marriage expectations. This crux with using this publication is that it contains absolutely no citations or indications of sources beyond a relatively short suggested reading list at the end.²⁶ In fact, the publication does not even cite any publisher or author except that of the preface. Accordingly, information that is found in this document was largely pursued in other sources wherever possible to provide source traceability and validation.

The products of the large strategic study groups such as RAND, the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), and the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) are heavily used for specific information. The books produced by the strategic study groups are comprehensive and remove biases wherever possible and are therefore are used as a priority source. These books attempt to be the most up to date at the time of publishing and many are quickly overcome by events in a matter of years since they are designed to aid in strategic decision making. Still, some of the older versions have very informative sections such as the 1997 RAND publication by James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization*

²⁶ Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*, 2007.

of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications, with an entire section on places of birth and geographic favoritism.²⁷

Outside of the study groups, significant literature has been developed in the form of full-length books. These titles are important in understanding the narrative on China and often have primary sources uniquely available to the particular author. The issue in a non-biased analysis such as being attempted in this thesis is that most books are argumentative titles with an agenda either that is hawkish or pacifist. Titles such as *The Hundred-Year Marathon* paint all events within China as part of a grand strategy to overcome the United States.²⁸ On the other side, *China Rising* attempts to convince the reader that the rise of China will lead to a stable and more peaceful Asia and therefore should be left alone.²⁹ This author will avoid wherever possible inferring a bias into the Chinese culture and will use such sources critically.

Journal articles are used to reinforce published pieces throughout this thesis. Most of the discussion on PLAN officers prior to this thesis's final generation have been described within published books or collections of works in edited volumes. Accordingly, journal articles discussing the current changes in China are much more prevalent in chapter 7 than the earlier chapters.

²⁷ Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps*.

²⁸ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015).

²⁹ David C Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Another use of journals in this thesis is in the sociology theory. The research foundation of this thesis's generations within the PLAN is built upon Mannheim's 1923 essay. As a seminal work, much of the analysis of this essay resides in published social science journal entries which were also used as needed. The basis of generations and what defines them is markedly a product of sociology and political science journals. This author does not make any attempt to add to or critique the discussion on Mannheim's work; it is the springboard used to look into the PLAN officer corps. More detail on existing literature on social generations is provided in chapter 3 as generational concepts are discussed in more detail.

Many Chinese primary sources are available for the years following widespread adoption of the Internet, many have not been translated into English for use by this author. Prior to 2014 the Open Source Center, a US government agency, could be used to read Chinese primary source media not designed for export (internal newspapers and magazines).³⁰ Although still available for use by those in the government, use of the information following that date is now designated "For Official Use Only" and therefore only those translations made prior to 2014 are usable from the Open Source Center. The lack of reliably translated articles for the most recent two years has minimum impact on the ability to develop this thesis, but likely will for subsequent academics focused on China as the years go on.

³⁰ Info Today, "Government WNC Feed Shuts Down," accessed September 27, 2015, <http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/Digest/Government-WNC-Feed-Shuts-Down-92436.asp>.

Prior to the Open Source Center, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (commonly referred to only by its acronym FBIS) performed this service and widely disseminated their works with no restrictions. Those that were accessed for this research resided on microfilm and are openly accessible to any scholar. The advantage of using the FBIS pieces from the period is that although it is often full of propaganda, it is propaganda designed for the Chinese audience, not the United States audience. Since this thesis is focused on the experience of the PLAN officers, looking at the exact method events and changes were presented to them is of great value and FBIS works are quoted when possible.

In general, this thesis is not intended to challenge particular paradigms on China or what is commonly known of its people. As this topic has hitherto not been discussed (at least in published items outside of China), it will draw from the existing—albeit highly dispersed—knowledge on Chinese Naval officers as a people. This thesis attempts to provide an image of who they are and what they have experienced. Conclusions on what this means into the future is a subject for subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL GENERATIONS & METHODOLOGY

The formal sociological analysis of the generation phenomenon can be of help in so far as we may possibly learn from it what can and what cannot be attributed to the generation factor as one of the factors impinging upon the social process.³¹

— Karl Mannheim,
Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge

Political Science on Social Generations

Nearly all key works on generations discussing the leadership of China refer either directly or indirectly to a key work by Karl Mannheim titled “The Problem of Generations.”³² As noted in a 1997 case study that used Mannheim’s work as a theoretical foundation, social generations are seldom used in lieu of “social class theory, and more recently, gender and ethnicity.”³³ In general, it is difficult to define a large group of people as homogenous and broad characterizations are often coined with the taboo term “stereotypes.” The PLAN officer corps however is not society in general, it’s a relatively homogenous group that is forced through specific key events and lends itself well to generations based on their date of entrance. There will be certain individuals that do not match, but they would be the exception.

³¹ Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, 320.

³² Ibid., 276-320.

³³ Ruth Cherrington, “Generational Issues in China: A Case Study of the 1980s Generation of Young Intellectuals,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (June 1997): 303.

Detailing social generations requires a stable footing in sociology theory to ensure key requirements are met and social phenomenon are not incorrectly used to create or dismiss generational changes. The first of these concepts is the analysis of what conditions must exist to allow a social generation to form. Mannheim detailed five attributes of society that allows the formation of social generations by comparing it to an imaginary utopian society which would not have generations. Each of these five attributes, which will follow this, exist within the PLAN officer corps, and are stronger than the society writ large that Mannheim was addressing.

The five attributes are discussed in the order that Mannheim listed them in his seminal work, with the third attribute of particular note. As indicated in the introduction, chapter 1, the third attribute is not conclusively addressed in this chapter and will consume discussions in chapters 5, 6, and 7; only to be wrapped back together in the thesis conclusions within chapter 8. The reason for this and an introduction to the flow of the subsequent chapters is provided during the discussion of the attribute.

The PLA in general is discussed for those themes that are broadly applicable, narrowing to PLA officers, PLAN members, and PLAN officers as appropriate. For each of the following quotations in relation to the generational attributes, see the footnote of this sentence.³⁴

³⁴ To allow proper formatting, all of the five subsequent underlined headers are quotations from the following work: Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, 293-301.

Five Social Generation Attributes

“The continuous emergence of new participants in the cultural process”

The PLA in peacetime, as any stable large organization, is constantly bringing in new members to maintain a desired personnel level. As will be discussed later, there are strong demands that force people out of the PLA which mandates a near constant influx. PLA members are not born into the PLA such as one could reason that a Spartan soldier was. All PLA members were first not part of the PLA, experienced a notable portion of their conscious life outside of its direct control, then at one point were either forced into it or personally volunteered to enter it. Mannheim refers to these methods of gaining new members as a “fresh contact” using a peasant that leaves the countryside for a relatively urban environment as an example.³⁵ This is a particularly dramatic method for entering into a social generation since the individual must change their attitudes and cultural identity to match that of the new group, the PLA.

Although each new member will be taught large portions of their newfound groups heritage and traditions, not all of it will be accepted and some will be outright rejected as they did not have the same experiences of the earlier members to accept it. An example may be an older naval generation believes that sailing skills are critical to practice since they had to use it several times. The newer generation however believes those times are past, accepts some value in practicing it, but focuses more efforts in steam engines once they take leadership roles. This selective acceptance of culture and heritage

³⁵ Mannheim originally refers to leaving the countryside for a town, but this comparison is not as strong as it was one hundred years ago. Ibid., 293.

is a critical attribute in social generation formation and is a function of new members entering constantly and evaluating what they were taught but did not directly experience.

“The continuous withdrawal of previous participants in the process of culture”

The PLA is constantly removing large numbers of its participants due to the culmination of their conscription period, incompatibility with the culture, outside career prospects, or mandatory retirement ages. The enlisted ranks (non-cadre) have always pushed out its members and returned them to society writ large. PLA officers however did not have mandatory requirement ages for a large portion of the PLA's history which resulted in few promotions and senior officers significantly older than mid-level officers. This was most notable in the decades that followed the Korean War.

Although discussed by Mao several times, real changes that forced out older military and governmental officials did take effect until the 1980s.³⁶ Table 1 provides the mandatory retirement ages for the various military grades within the PLA. There are some waivers allowed for particular grades and non-combat units but the limits are generally applicable.³⁷ Therefore, we can say the present PLA, including its officer corps, has a continuous withdrawal of members. This removal is important as it forces out older ideas and experiences allowing the newer members' voices to grow stronger and more powerful to affect change which generates social generation change.

³⁶ For example, the age of senior military leaders declined 10 percent between 1982 and 1986. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps*, 33-37.

³⁷ Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, Asian Security Studies (London: Routledge, 2006), 56-57.

Table 1. Mandatory Military Retirement Ages by Grade

Grade	Grade name	Retirement age
1	CMC Chairman Vice Chairmen	N/A
2	CMC Member	N/A
3	Military Region Leader	65
4	Military Reg. Deputy Leader	63
5	Corps (Jun) Leader	55
6	Corps (Jun) Deputy Leader	55
7	Division Leader	50
8	Division Deputy Leader	50
9	Regiment Leader	45
10	Regiment Deputy Leader	45
11	Battalion Leader	40
12	Battalion Deputy Leader	40
13	Company Leader	35
14	Company Deputy Leader	35
15	Platoon Leader	30

Source: Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2013), 232.

“Members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally limited section of the historical process”

Coinciding with the previous two attributes that people are both constantly entering and leaving the society, experiences are limited to only portions of the culture that they were present for. Those that experienced the Chinese Civil War in the PLA clearly have a different experience and mental model than those that joined immediately after its conclusion. The idea that particular experiences, particularly those in one's youth, define a social generation is perhaps the easiest of the concepts to accept at face value. The magnitude of the events and how narrow the period of events affects how strong the changes in the social generations are. Dramatic and sudden events such as

major wars are significantly clearer generational transitions than progressive changes such as the Industrial Revolution.

The limited participation in events is the locus of this thesis and is how the separations in generations will be made. China, and specifically the PLAN, has had many dramatic and sudden changes compared to society in general and is particularly apt for such generational separations accordingly. However, defining exactly where these transitions occur and the nature of the events that heralded the changes requires dedicated historical event presentation if the reader desires to take the conclusions at more than face value.

Three social generations within the PLAN officer corps were found to exist in its present form. Each are delineated in their own respective chapter (5, 6, and 7) and will discuss how a group of key events at the onset of that particular period notably changed those in their formative years (17-25 years old) during that period. As an example, the second generation (presented in chapter 6) that starts in approximately 1982 will discuss how the downsizing of the PLA that commenced in earnest by 1981 was significant for that generation and changed their view compared to the previous generation.

The list of events in each chapter will not be exhaustive and instead focuses on a handful of key events that delineate are important and had far reaching impacts. The effort of these chapters is not to present a detailed history of these periods, but rather the changes in the nature of the PLAN on or near the demarcation point for a generation in comparison to the previous period.

“The necessity for constant transmission of the cultural heritage”

The PLA operates untold numbers of equipment and machinery as part of its military. As people are constantly leaving the PLA, it must therefore constantly train and educate its new members in the methods to operate as a fighting force. This includes not just the physical aspects of warfighting but includes how to live in the barracks, interact with people of different ranks, and even how to dress. This requires an interaction between the different parts of the PLA, namely different social generations. During these countless interactions each day, the cultural heritage and experiences are being transmitted to the new members. The new members cannot experience much of the history they are given, and accordingly are viewing it through their own lens generated from those experiences they have had. This interaction is not only at the bottom ranks between recruits and trainers, but also occurs throughout the echelons where generations differ. Senior officers instructing field grade officers on their duties and responsibilities or detailing their plans for a battle are both examples of this transmission.

During this process, some of the culture is being transferred and some is being rejected. Where the rejections are strong, there is great friction. Written rules, such as doctrine in the case of the military, can be seen as the written form of this heritage. When the senior social group turns over, it is common to see changes to those parts that no longer reflect their opinions. This reflects a social generation gap resulting during the transfer of experiences that has not been accepted by the newer group. This change is what is focused on in most Chinese social generation works; what a change in the top leadership should mean for a period of time based on how their experiences differed from their predecessors.

“The uninterrupted generation series”

Two concepts nest within this attribute. First, that there is not a temporary elimination of the organization followed by its restoration from scratch although in the same name. An example would be that all standing armies and even militias are banned and all mobilized forces are stood down at the end of each war. Clearly this would not generate a social generation structure in the PLA. The second concept relates back to the first attribute, a continuous gaining of members. If the gaining of new members is entirely stopped for a long period of time (years), the normal social generation process would not work as the first interaction between the old generations and newest generation would not be softened by nearly any similarities in experiences of those that joined after the old generation but before the newest. This is not to say this cannot happen and that social generations would not exist, but that the disassociation would be far greater with notable friction. From the perspective of the PLA in the period analyzed, following the Cultural Revolution, the PLA can firmly be considered to be uninterrupted.

Conclusions on Attributes

Of the five different attributes required for an organization to have generations present, four were shown to exist within the PLAN officer corps during the period following the Cultural Revolution to the present. The one attribute not presented, the third, addresses the fact that not all people in the PLAN had the same experiences and requires further discussion. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will present the transitions in experiences of people during specific bands of time to both show that multiple generations are present in the current PLAN and to delineate where we can approximate the transitions to exist by date of entrance to the PLAN.

Specifics of Social Generations and Generational Units

A footing in important generational theory terminology and selected concepts nested within that of social generations is needed prior to delineating specific transition points accurately. The section that follows uses the terms and concepts as presented by Mannheim. To be clear, much of what will follow is a summary of social generation theory nuances, but absent the introduction a person may leave with fallacies on generations or challenge conclusions presented based on personal preconceptions.

Social generations are the logical, and arguably theoretical, product of the five attributes of a society. A critical look at society in the practical indicates several flaws emerge that require addressing with specific explanations and terms to support this thesis. Each of the following concepts have dedicated paragraphs to explain them and examples are provided as needed to illustrate them. The first is the separation of generations into generational units which are a subset of a given generation defined by their opinions resulting from their experiences in the generation. The second is the “entelechy” of the society that is being evaluated. This is an uncommon term with many definitions rooted in biology and logic theory, but is the one used by Mannheim and therefore will be used. The third and final term is that of a concrete experience and specifically how manifest it is in defining a social generation. Countless additional terms and concepts exist to describe social generations but are omitted as they are not required to achieve a sufficient foundation for this thesis.

A social generation can be defined broadly in entire nations, or as specifically as within smaller towns that have had notable events and experiences. Looking into each of these generations closer however, an observer will note that there are differences of

opinion as to what these experiences mean and what path each group within the generation wishes to take because of them. Within China, the Cultural Revolution clearly was a shared experience in the 1960s, but opinions on it vary greatly depending on a persons role and respective personality.³⁸ A portion of a given age group believe it was the correct action for the country while others believe it was a period of extreme turmoil and suffering. There may also be several other minor groupings that can be made depending on the specificity desired in the analysis. The differing groups of thought are referred to as generational units but still reside within the same generation.³⁹ A modern example within the United States would be the separation between conservatives and liberals where political affiliation is the generational unit deciding factor. Differing opinions does not separate a social generation from another however, only actual experiences do.

Generational unit bonds are often stronger than the bonds of a generation.⁴⁰ This idea of a generational unit being dominant was stated by Mannheim when looking at an open society whereby a certain freedom of opinion was acceptable and a person would not be expelled if they did not match. When looking at the society at large, such expulsion from the pool would only occur from either a genocide or banishment of people. This is not the case within the PLA which is a de facto gated part of society with

³⁸ Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, no. 59 (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1988), 126; Yahuda, "Political Generations in China," 793-796.

³⁹ Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, 304-307.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

its own commercial areas, lodging, and even employs political officers to further change the minds of its members to a particular Communist Party view. Dissenting members who are too vocal would be ousted and therefore it is not correct to assume generational unit differences are stronger than those of generations within the PLA.

The entelechy of the society should be interpreted to broadly mean the trend of the society overall with respect to how it views the world regardless of particular experiences.⁴¹ This concept should not be interpreted as the trending resulting from particular generational units dominating the recent series of generations (for example, a long series of highly conservative leaders). There may be overall trends within a generational unit between each generation, or a general domination of particular units overall, but that is not what is meant by the entelechy of a society. The entelechy of a society is beyond all group trending below that of whole generations. An example is generally increasing human rights is an entelechy of the overall world for the past several centuries. Regardless of what party is in power at a particular time, generally the rights of a person have increased from the Middle Ages. Although there is some variation in some locations, in general societies are heading in the direction of a rights based entelechy. This concept is important when trying to frame if a trend is a result of a generational change or is an overall societal entelechy being manifested.

The third concept, that of concrete experiences, nests into the formation of a social generation. These are key events that were of sufficient magnitude to adjust the world view of those who underwent it and define a generation. They are often traumatic

⁴¹ See detailed discussion on an entelechy in Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, 314-315.

events such as a war or perhaps a nearby volcanic eruption, but can also be less traumatic and chronologically finite - yet still greatly impactful - such as the widespread adoption of the internet. The key being that a concrete experience, particularly in the formative years of 17-25, is an experience that differentiates them from other generations in that they experienced it and it adjusted their world view.

In an attempt to visualize the concepts presented hitherto, Figure 4 is provided. No visual aids were found in any sociology literature on this topic and therefore this represents the concepts as best understood by this author. Each of the large circles, which is separated into three nominal sub-circles, indicates a generation. The transition between generations is indicated by a fuzzy line to represent the transition point between the generations on a time scale from left to right. The line is not solid or thin due to the inability to say for sure when the change occurred, but that only an estimate can be made. Each of the large generation circles is shown with three nominal generational units within in that indicate that although a generation exists, it is not homogenous. Different opinions exist within it although the members have shared experiences. Finally a trend of the overall society, the entelechy, is shown that exists outside the nature of the dominant generational unit and is a product of trending over many generations. Although it is shown going up, this does not mean the society is always heading to more order or necessarily to a more positive state.

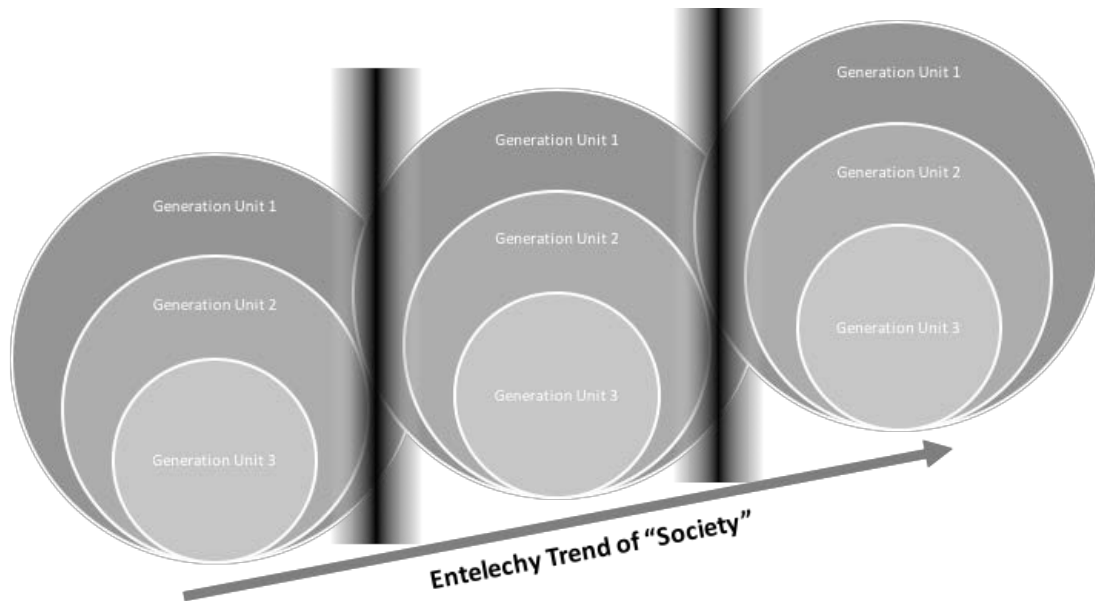


Figure 4. Social Generation Transitions and Generational Units

Source: Created by author.

Three social generation concepts were presented: generational units, societal entelechy, and concrete experiences. Each of them help to explain how a group of people can form a generation yet have a different view on what to do because of that experience. A social generation does not mean a group of people with a constant outlook, but instead is founded on experiences in a person's formative years that serves as the lens to which the view the rest of the world. Each generational unit can be vastly different from each other, but are still united in experiences.

Contemporary Looks at Mannheim's Work

In the century following Mannheim's work, there have been many published works supporting or refuting aspects of his essay or branching it further. Jane Pilcher's 1994 journal article in *The British Journal of Sociology* discusses the legacy of

Mannheim's generation work and what portions are supported largely to this day.⁴² Of importance to terminology within this thesis, Pilcher makes note that the term generation is in fact inappropriate due to its link to kinship, and notes the term cohort would be more appropriate. As Pilcher acknowledges however, the interoperability of the two terms in this context is widely accepted and is why the term generation will be used throughout this thesis.⁴³ It is simply easier for a person to understand.

Pilcher also notes the difficulty in using empirical definitions of generations (specific date bands) due to the inherent conflict with using qualitative means to define the generations (types of experiences).⁴⁴ I acknowledge this difficulty and although specific dates will be given, the reader should be aware that some tolerance should be assumed. The highly specific requirements for entry into the PLA in terms of age provides more finite tolerance of pre-PLA experience and in general tightens such tolerances.⁴⁵ Furthermore, promotion windows between both the different grades and ranks assist homogenous experiences of a particular generation.

⁴² Jane Pilcher, "Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy," *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 3 (September 1994): 481-95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 483.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁴⁵ Direct commission requires a "bachelor's degree and to be age twenty-four or younger." Kenneth Allen and Morgan Clemens, *The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2014), 10.

Conclusion

Karl Mannheim's social generation theory can be used to investigate what social generations exist within the PLAN. Of the five attributes that are required for a social generation to exist, four were shown to exist within the currently serving PLAN and that they were stronger than society in general. The one attribute not detailed was the third which requires the members of a generation to have experienced notably different events than those before and after them. Using this attribute, this thesis will demonstrate in chapters 5, 6, and 7 that three distinct generations can be formed from the PLAN officer corps due the changing environment PLAN officer's experienced in their formative years.

The three chapters will be historical in nature to allow the key events that changed formative experiences to be detailed. Once the collection of events has been established and the key years by which transitions described, chapter 8 will resolve the final missing attribute and demarcate the approximate dates of the social generations in the PLAN officer corps.

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE NAVY FROM REVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION (1911-1976)

One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant.⁴⁶

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Overview

There are many common misconceptions about China's Navy in both the present and looking into the past. To ensure a sufficient base of knowledge for a reader is established, an overview is provided that details each of the major events as related to the Navy over the past century. In general, China has attempted to build and maintain a Navy several times in the past few centuries. It was often a side-show to the Army and its early brutal defeats such as that at the Battle of Yalu River against the Japanese fleet in 1894 provided significant setbacks to any expansion efforts.

All educated officers understand their nation's military history, and specifically that of their particular military branch. This is no different for the Chinese, and therefore reviewing the last century of Chinese Naval History has merit before entering into the details of the modern PLAN. This chapter will provide a historical introduction to the

⁴⁶ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, 26th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 85.

Chinese Navy from the collapse of the Qing Dynasty through the end of the Cultural Revolution, approximately 1976, with emphasis on its officers' experiences.⁴⁷

Chinese Naval History

The Republican and Nationalist Navy (Prior to 1937)

The Chinese Revolution of 1911-1912 shook the political structure of China by unseating two millennium of Imperial Rule.⁴⁸ Armed warlords rose from the ashes of the Qing Dynasty in a period often referred to as an "Age of Confusion" that would not end until the 1937 invasion by Japan.⁴⁹ Of some irony, this period brought relative stability to the Chinese Naval Officer Corps due to their ability to remain aloof during the most serious confrontations. Although many scholars dismiss this period as anarchy, this is because they view it from the perspective of the national leaders, not the naval officers. A western observer during this period noted, "vessels have been changing their allegiance . . . with bewildering frequency."⁵⁰ Although this is true, the officers were almost never

⁴⁷ The name PLAN was not used since this period will discuss the Chinese Imperial Navy, the Nationalist Navy, and the emergence of the PLAN.

⁴⁸ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 28.

⁴⁹ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 126.

⁵⁰ "The Chinese Navy," in *Shanghai Defense Force and Volunteers*, North China Daily Herald (Shanghai, 1929), 1302, quoted in Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 5.

punished and even outright defections were quickly forgiven.⁵¹ This stability is observable through three key facts that show an organization not paralyzed like other branches of the armed forces at the time. First, the Navy transitioned from provincial navies into three Naval Squadrons based on the type of area they operated in. Second, the Fujianese control of the Chinese Navy was maintained, enforcing a highly regimented structure and general professionalism in its officers. Finally, naval training and education was broadened domestically and relied less upon Western Nations than under the Qing Dynasty.

Prior to 1912 the Chinese fleet was arranged geographically, that is specific ships were assigned to provinces and ports for the purpose of being locally controlled. A regional organization of the fleet was logical when the Navy consisted almost entirely of small junks with limited operational reach. However, prior to the fall of the Qing Dynasty and after the 1894 Battle of the Yalu River, the government purchased larger ships such as seafaring cruisers with eight-inch guns.⁵² When this is combined with the collapse of the semi-feudal system of the Qing Dynasty and the rise of Republican China, the former Navy command structure was no longer appropriate. Accordingly, “the traditional

⁵¹ For example, three cruisers defected to the provincial government of Canton, conducted piracy and smuggling for two years, then when defeated returned and “all was forgiven.” Also, although an officer had defected, he was “rarely removed from the navy list” and could often return later at the same rank. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 127, 139.

⁵² Ibid., 115.

geographic arrangement was discarded in favor of a functional alignment.”⁵³ Three squadrons were established that represented the three types of Naval forces being employed: coastal and ocean action, Yangzi River defense, and a training squadron.⁵⁴ This transition to functional Navy squadrons reflected the change towards a national navy instead of the largely feudal system of regions that existed in the past.

The professional officer corps of the Navy almost entirely came from one province, Fujian, both historically and throughout this period. In fact, the domination of the powerful Fujianese Naval officers appears to have gained in strength in this period. 60 percent of Naval officers of all ranks in 1888 were from Fujian; notably ten of the twelve Admirals and Captains were from Fujian.⁵⁵ The 1932 official navy figures, showed that 710 of the total 813 Naval Officers were from Fujian for an increase to a dominant 87 percent.⁵⁶ Some of this can be explained by the fact that Fujian was along the coast, and Navies are formed from regions where the people are “following the sea.”⁵⁷ However, a map analysis of China’s coast, its natural harbors, and its population distribution indicates this hardly accounts for such dominance. Simply put, the Navy was dominated by one region before and through this period, particularly its officers.

⁵³ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ These numbers are for the Bejing Navy and do not represent regional forces which are unknown. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 304.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁷ Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*, 45.

Training was overhauled and largely domestic in many areas due to a combination of the international perception of China and the First World War. For a majority of the time leading up to the Sino-Japanese War the major nations to include Great Britain, Germany, and the United States refused to sell ships to what was perceived as bands of Chinese warlords.⁵⁸ Training in this era typically included a joint prospect of both ship sales and the corresponding training, so without ship sales the Chinese Navy was left to train itself. Accordingly for “the period from 1912 to 1937, China maintained six naval schools and two shipyards that functioned on a sporadic basis.”⁵⁹ Quality varied from school to school but several appeared to have been successful, with one academy designing and building its own hydroplanes and teaching “emerging weapon theory.”⁶⁰ From this it cannot be said that the Chinese Navy training improved in the period under the Republic Government, but indications are its training was stable compared to the rest of the country in the period. The foreign advisors and international training of the Chinese Navy begun to resume in the mid-1930s as its international perception improved.

The Republican Period would quickly come to a close on July 7th 1937 following the Marco Polo Bridge incident which opened the Second Sino-Japanese War. Eventually the conflict would merge into World War Two as yet another one of the theaters of the global war.⁶¹ The Chinese Navy was a relatively small and outdated force that had not

⁵⁸ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 141-152.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ S. C. M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 128-131.

undergone the material renaissance of the major powers such as Japan. Its purchases of foreign ships had been too brief and too late to make a notable change in its size and capabilities. The Navy had survived the turbulent times better than most organizations in China, but not more capable and this would be apparent in the war.

Chinese Civil War

By the end of World War Two, although a victory for the Chinese over the forces of Imperial Japan, the Chinese Navy was non-existent.⁶² The Chinese Navy had successfully held off Japanese Forces long enough to move the Chinese Government to Chungking - deep in the mountains of China.⁶³ The vastly superior Japanese Navy finally broke the remaining Chinese holds on the Yangzi river in 1940 and the Navy Ministry was subsequently dissolved.⁶⁴ The last two regular Chinese ships to be sunk in the war, the *Chaing Kun* and *Chiang Hsi*, were “sunk near Patung on 24 August 1941,” many years before the end of World War Two.⁶⁵

What was not fully destroyed however were the people of the Chinese Navy. Approximately “2,000 Chinese naval personnel [were] in the United States and Great

⁶² David G. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, Westview Special Studies on East Asia (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 7.

⁶³ Richard N. J. Wright, *The Chinese Steam Navy 1862-1945* (London: Chatham, 2000), 176.

⁶⁴ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 166.

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Chinese Steam Navy 1862-1945*, 176.

Britain” for training at the outbreak of the war and returned to China in 1945.⁶⁶ A further two hundred naval officers had been domestically trained in the mountains by 1944 under Admiral Chen Shaokuan.⁶⁷ The largely young and unexperienced group of officers would form the foundation for the new Chinese Nationalist Navy. By 1947 the Nationalist Navy had ballooned to 29,000 officers and sailors.⁶⁸ As often occurs following major wars, the victors also sold off or donated their war surplus ships to countries which were decimated, such as China. The Chinese Navy between 1945 and 1949 received 271 ships of various sizes from the United States alone.⁶⁹

In contrast to the Nationalist Navy, the Communist forces maintained a small contingent of naval forces of between 20 and 30 gunboats at the end of World War Two.⁷⁰ The Chinese Communist Navy began training its naval officers in 1946 in the port of Dalian under the direction of the Soviet Navy. The two requirements for admittance were intelligence and strong standing within the Communist Party.⁷¹

Unlike the Nationalist Navy which was being designed as an ocean going navy, the Communist Navy was seen as purely an extension of the Peoples Liberation Army. The Nationalist governments ability to move troops and material by the sea lines of

⁶⁶ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 7.

⁶⁷ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 167.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁶⁹ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁷¹ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 173.

communication frustrated many Communist attacks and limited their ability to gain the initiative. The expansion of the Communist Navy was the logical product of this dilemma. Furthermore, as the Communists started to gain the upper edge in the civil war, it became clear they would need a means to access the islands bordering the coastal regions of China. This included the island of Taiwan whose ability to isolate itself by its and its allies navies ultimately inhibited the Communist desire to put an end to the Nationalist government.⁷² Accordingly, the Communist Navy expanded as much as it could—but never sufficient to challenge the Nationalist Navy directly.

The Chinese Civil War was almost exclusively a land based conflict. Several key battles and retrogrades were aided by Naval Forces, but in general the two Navies did not become decisively engaged. The Nationalist government would eventually fall back on its Navy, using it to evacuate to Taiwan. Over “600,000 military personnel and 2 million civilians” were moved to Taiwan by the Navy, including Chaing Kai-Shek in a destroyer.⁷³ Significant elements of the Nationalist Navy however would be taken by the Communists before the retreat was complete, mostly by desertion. In just one incident, an “entire squadron, consisting of one destroyer, three destroyer escorts, one patrol gunboat, five landing ships, and eight smaller auxiliaries, defected.”⁷⁴ This particular defection was so complete that it included both the squadron commander and his officers.

⁷² Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 12.

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 182.

One of the notable defections was the *Chongqing* which was a modern ship manned by a crew trained by the United States and England. Within its hold at the time of defection was 500,000 silver dollars representing the Nationalist emergency fund.⁷⁵ Its commander, Captain Deng Zhaoxiang, defected with all the money and survived his transition to Communism; he was even selected as “deputy commander of the PRC’s North Sea Fleet” in 1977.⁷⁶

Use of former Nationalist naval officers and sailors was common in the initial Communist Navy—approximately 2000 former Nationalists deserted and joined by 1949.⁷⁷ An official PLAN account acknowledges the ships were largely the “confiscated old and damaged KMT vessels . . . [totaling] 183 warships and other vessels that had been surrendered, captured or discarded.”⁷⁸ Keeping with the traditions of the Communist ground forces, the Communist Navy was being armed and sustained by the loot of their successful campaigns.

Unlike the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Navy survived the Civil War split between the Nationalists who fled to Taiwan and the Communists who retained the mainland. The sailors on both sides of the conflict were almost entirely new to their profession; Japan had only surrendered four years earlier allowing limited reconstruction. Accordingly, both the Nationalists and the Communists had nearly equal levels of naval

⁷⁵ Ibid., 180.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁷⁷ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 13; Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 7.

⁷⁸ Gao Xiaoxing et al., *The PLA Navy* (New York: CN Times Books, 2014), 71.

technical knowledge as the Civil War's ground combat ended. However, the Nationalists had strong international alliances which eliminated any real planning for a large-scale invasion of Taiwan or even local sea control by the communists.

The PLAN Emerges and the Korean War Test

The Chinese Communist Navy, hereafter referred to as the PLAN, was quickly put to test in what was largely an extension of the Civil War against the Nationalists combined with the threat of a United States naval attack due to Chinese involvement in the Korean War. Recognizing the futility of open ocean competition with either the Nationalists or their United States ally, China formed a coastal defense strategy that was supported by vast earthworks and defenses. One such defense included a "250-mile, 10-foot-wide communication trench paralleling the Yangzi river" with "a machine-gun position . . . every several hundred meters, and an artillery position . . . every 1,000 or 2,000 meters."⁷⁹ The command overseeing the coastal defense, the East China Military Command, numbered over 450,000 personnel and included the East China People's Navy—one of the precursors to the PLAN. The origin of the PLAN as a military branch subordinate to the army could not have been more apparent in its initial command layout.

The PLAN was formally established in May 1950, but it was not until September 1950 the national navy headquarters brought the smaller regional navies, such as the East China People's Navy, under its command.⁸⁰ Although the Navy was at least attempting to

⁷⁹ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 187.

⁸⁰ Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 7; Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 15.

operate as a unified branch, the dominance of the Army was still clear. The first PLAN commander to be selected was Xiao Jingguang; a career communist soldier who was a friend of Mao since seventeen, made the Long March, and had worked alongside Lin Biao in Manchuria.⁸¹ Xiao's influence in the PLAN was, and partially still is, significant if not for any reason other than he held the position for twenty-nine years—from January of 1950 to 1979.⁸² Xiao was the PLAN commander when the current PLAN leadership entered the PLA and his policies were certainly impacted by his experience as a soldier in the early years. A specific element that likely affected his appointment to the navy billet and impacted the ultimate direction of PLAN training was that Xiao was fluent in Russian.⁸³ Significant numbers of ships and submarines would be received through the Soviets as a product of the Sino-Soviet agreements and good communication at the top was paramount in the early days.

The rapid professionalization of the PLAN as it left the Civil War is truly stunning. The communist leaders recognized that almost the entirety of experienced officers and sailors were former Nationalists who had defected and quickly put them to work. The Nanjing Naval Academy was established and trained approximately 3,000 sailors, almost entirely former communist soldiers, in its first class alone.⁸⁴ The intent

⁸¹ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 15.

⁸² Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*, 14; Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 15.

⁸³ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

was to extract the knowledge of the former Nationalists rapidly and then man all ships using newly trained, and politically reliable, Communist sailors. Naval officer training was established at Nanjing in 1955 where junior officers underwent a four-year course and senior officers (many whom were former Army officers) received two-and-a-half-year courses.⁸⁵ The Soviet school at Dalian (the same location used by the Soviets in 1946) taught a four-year course that was technical in nature and received the best students from China.⁸⁶ The PLAN was benefiting from the knowledge provided to the Nationalists by the Western nations while also receiving direct training from the Soviets.

Cultural Revolution

It is difficult to understand the magnitude of the Cultural Revolution⁸⁷ from the artifacts and stories that remain from it. Similar intra-national events, on approximately the same scale, are very rare and limited to nations such as the Soviet Union. Paramilitary groups called Red Guards united under an extremist ideology and a cult of personality around Mao and rose up in 1966 following public announcements indicating support. Although initially they were supported by the state, they rapidly left control of all country leadership. As the name of the revolution implies, the idea was to correct a perceived issue in the Chinese culture whereby the peasant was not sufficiently revered. Teachers,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 199-200.

⁸⁷ Several period pieces will refer to this as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution or use the acronym “GPCR.” Cultural Revolution is the accepted contemporary term for this period and its events and will be used throughout.

engineers, and other even moderately educated persons were cast out of their billets and sent to remote locations to learn from the peasants for years. This also included their families in most cases and persisted for years through all levels of society. Even the PLA was instructed to be involved in the cultural revolution which was ordered to provide “active support . . . to the broad masses of revolutionary Leftists in their struggle to seize power.”⁸⁸

The most brutal parts of the Cultural Revolution ended in 1968, although many of the policies continued, follow a brutal restoration of control by the PLA against the Red Guards that left untold numbers dead. Most Westerners would view such events with nothing but horror and perhaps the period, if it occurred in the West, would be followed with a national suffering for years in line with that seen following World War One in France and England. Henry Kissinger’s summary of the events’ impact however indicates a slightly different take: “None of the victims of the Cultural Revolution I have known has ever volunteered his suffering to me or responded to queries with more than minimal information. The Cultural Revolution is treated, sometimes wryly, as a kind of natural catastrophe that had to be endured but is not dwelt on as defining the person’s life afterward.”⁸⁹ This is not the only opinion on the Cultural Revolution as many authors have written books on their experiences as the Chinese government has lifted publication restrictions progressively. However, Kissinger’s view is likely the most overall balanced.

⁸⁸ Harold C. Hinton, ed., *Government and Politics in Revolutionary China: Selected Documents, 1949-1979* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1982), 251.

⁸⁹ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 323.

It is a fair assessment to say that the PLAN and its officers were impacted less by the Cultural Revolution than the PLA broadly. As a force that was generally more independent due to the nature of sea service and reduced interaction with the population, the PLAN largely provided “lip service and loyalty in return for being left alone to pursue professional development.”⁹⁰ One thing that did change and affected practically every ship was that the largely vacant political officer billets were filled. Reinforcing the concept of a transition, in February 1968 it was announced “that naval staff officers were beginning programs of political study.”⁹¹ Such a statement that the political training of its officers was now just starting provides a solid example that the PLAN did in fact become more political, but it still paled in comparison to other groups within China.

The PLAN did experience some turmoil during the Cultural Revolution as it attempted to determine if it supported or opposed the changes. The PLAN headquarters split into two separate groups in what became called the “struggle between the two headquarters” that was described in a “little white book” issued in July 1967.⁹² Very little information on this incident has been made available, but the South Sea Fleet Commander was eventually “dismissed and jailed” for not siding with the winning

⁹⁰ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 137.

⁹¹ Ibid., 139.

⁹² Lushun Naval Command, “Lin Biao-Li Zuopeng fandang panjun zuixing wenjian huibian” (Document Collection on Lin Biao and Li Zuopeng’s Criminal Activities of Attacking the Party and Betraying the PLA), October 1971, political files against the Lin-Li group (1971-72), 24-25, Lushun Naval Base Archives, PLAN, Lushun, Liaoning quoted in Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 234.

faction.⁹³ Although this certainly shook up the higher leadership echelons at the time, there seems to have been little to no ramifications for the more junior officers involved.

End of the Cultural Revolution

There is no widely accepted date by which the Cultural Revolution can be considered to have ended and the subsequent era begun. In fact, the time between the Cultural Revolution ending and the rise of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s (although his power was not fully consolidated until the early 1980s) is largely marked by uncertainty and consternation within China as to what path was to be taken. As Mao neared death and his power waned, three separate factions vied for power in the vacuum that was forming.⁹⁴

The notorious Gang of Four, led by Mao's wife Jiang Qing often referred to as "Madame Mao", believed that the methods and actions of the Cultural Revolution were correct and needed immediate reinforcement.⁹⁵ Their stance can be summarized as a demand to return to the Cultural Revolution with renewed vigor and no apparent end. The more moderate faction, which was at times supported by Mao directly, included the

⁹³ Ibid. The sole source found for this event that has been translated is Li's book.

⁹⁴ The aforementioned reforms under Deng will be discussed in detail within chapter 4 as these events occurred within years beyond this chapter's focus.

⁹⁵ Kissinger, *On China*, 294-295.

designated replacement for Mao named Hua Guofeng.⁹⁶ His name is seldom mentioned today other than that he briefly led the country between Mao's death and the unification of power under Deng Xiaoping. The only action he took that had a "transcendent consequence" was that he had the Gang of Four arrested shortly after Mao's death during his attempts to consolidate power.⁹⁷ The third and final faction that existed on the other side of the spectrum from the Gang of Four was led by Deng Xiaoping which advocated reversing several of the policies of Mao to allow economic reforms within China including rejecting the Cultural Revolution.

As previously eluded to, Deng would seize power from Hua Guofeng but not suddenly or even violently. Largely unknown compared to other key leaders, Hua Guofeng was accused by Deng of being too conformal in the policies of late Mao. This imitation policy is commonly referred to both in and outside of China as the "two whatevers" that referred to continuing whatever policies and actions that were taken by Mao.⁹⁸ Deng instead embraced the concept that "Mao Zedong Thought is an ideological system" which resonated more widely and he used in a significant number of his

⁹⁶ Ibid., 328-329; For Appointment Announcement, see New China News Agency, April 7, 1976, in Hinton, *Government and Politics in Revolutionary China*, sec. 92.

⁹⁷ Kissinger, *On China*, 329.

⁹⁸ The original speech is contained in Hinton, *Government and Politics in Revolutionary China*, 391-393; The term "two whatevers" is used in the official Chinese translation in Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982*, trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 400; Kissinger, *On China*, 331-332.

speeches.⁹⁹ Although Deng did not directly state it, this system whereby Mao's statements were converted into an ideology allowed Deng to rapidly change course in several areas without vilifying the recently deceased Mao. The Mao cult of personality could continue to hold the country together although clearly it was on a path that Mao would not have endorsed.

⁹⁹ Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982*, 52.

CHAPTER 5

RECOVERY FROM THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION (1976–1981)

When we talk about seeking truth from facts, about the new period of development, and new historical conditions, we must say something about destruction and construction. At present and for some time to come, “destruction” means in-depth exposure and criticism of the “gang of four” and, collaterally, of Lin Biao too, so as to eliminate their pernicious influence. “Construction” means learning Mao Tse-tung thought accurately and as a comprehensive system and restoring and developing the fine traditions and style of work of our Party and army in the new historical conditions.

— Deng Xiaoping

Speech to the Army Political Conference on 2 June 1978

Introduction

The aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the power struggles that followed the death of Mao are the dominant events within China for those in their formative years between 1976 and 1981. This is a relatively brief period of time, but it is distinct from those that entered the PLAN before the death of Mao and those after Deng had consolidated his power. Truthfully, this author attempted to group those that entered the PLAN during this period with those that entered during the Cultural Revolution or those that followed the rise of Deng unsuccessfully. This social generation is simply unique in that they endured first-hand the Cultural Revolution and observed its impacts on older siblings, parents, and their teachers (or lack thereof). Yet only a few years later, shortly after their formative years, they would have to be leaders in the market based China that Deng would create as it debuted on the world economic scene.

Although the transition in power from Mao to Deng was relatively bloodless for such dramatic change, it would push and pull upon all of those in China. Public

announcements as late as 1976 were condemning Deng Xiaoping, but were praising him broadly by 1978.¹⁰⁰ This period of transition is further illustrated in the official works of Deng published between 1975 and 1982 which has a unexplained gap from October 1975 to May of 1977.¹⁰¹ Approximately a dozen works exist per year during all other times.

The PLAN itself experienced an identity crises of sorts at the end of the Cultural Revolution beyond that of the PLA broadly. It had tried to return to its technical roots in the mid-1970s but was thrust into the limelight as being misguided and bourgeois, one of the worst insults of the era. Their very desire to return to a naval style uniform was a particular target of Madame Mao in her final years of influence. The twisting of facts related to the island conflicts with Vietnam in 1973 and 1974 further illuminates some of the difficulties the PLAN faced in being externally prepared for modern war but internally handcuffed to a way of fighting that was based on an ideology.

The conscripts would flow in and out of the PLA due to their short service requirement, but the officers would have to either endure the riptide of this period or be ejected. Simply put, this generation of PLAN officers commissioned into a world of chaos, doublethink, and sudden change.

¹⁰⁰ The Central Committee admonished Deng on 7 April 1976 in a formal resolution which dismissed him “from all posts inside and outside the Party while allowing him to keep Party membership so as to see how he will behave himself in the future.” Hinton, *Government and Politics in Revolutionary China*, 367.

¹⁰¹ Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982*, 7-9.

Cultural Revolution Education Aftershocks

Officer training had been all but eliminated during the Cultural Revolution. Whereas in 1960 there were 137 PLA academies and schools, by 1969 the number dropped to 43 although the PLA had actually expanded.¹⁰² Deng would turn this around rapidly as he rose in influence and made rejection of the Cultural Revolution his hallmark policy. In 1978, “new regulations provided that all officers were to have graduated from military academies.”¹⁰³ It is important to note that this requirement did not have a grandfathering clause that allowed officers that entered earlier to not meet this requirement. Those officers who entered the PLA during the Cultural Revolution without being educated (as many were) would have to take part-time classes or face elimination from the officer ranks.¹⁰⁴

The PLAN suffered even worse than the broad PLA in terms of education by the end of the Cultural Revolution. Strictly by the numbers, only 5 of the 13 PLAN academies, 1 of the 5 engineering schools, and 2 of 25 Military Region schools remained open by 1969.¹⁰⁵ Recall that the requirement for officer education was not restored until

¹⁰² June Teufel Dreyer, “The New Officer Corps: Implications for the Future,” in *China’s Military in Transition*, ed. David L. Shambaugh and Richard H. Yang (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas J. Bickford, “Trends in Education and Training, 1924-2007; From Whampoa to Nanjing Polytechnic,” in *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2008), 30. Not all sources agree upon exactly the number closed, but the magnitudes and values

1978. Using available figures from 1980, the PLAN had nearly 100 attack submarines and 1250 warships of all types if auxiliaries are excluded.¹⁰⁶ Specific to the 100 submarines, the Submarine School had been shuttered for four of the years of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁷ It does not take a navy specialist to recognize that the quality of training and therefore their professionalism, maintenance, and operational capabilities must have suffered greatly during this period. Bernard Cole best summarizes the Cultural Revolution's impact on the PLAN as follows: "A review of global naval developments indicates that PLAN modernization was retarded by perhaps two decades as a result of the program's restrictions and the personnel losses that resulted from this political maelstrom."¹⁰⁸

Recovery would not be as simple as an order for a change in direction from above; over a decade of officers had been trained in an education wasteland. However, the key leadership of the PLAN appears to have been chomping at the bit to start the transition based on how quickly they changed their outward political tune. "By the end of October [in 1976] . . . the navy weighed in with appropriate criticisms, even hinting at

are generally similar. This source was chosen since it is the most recently published by a reliable source.

¹⁰⁶ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 306.

¹⁰⁷ John Wilson Lewis and Litai Xue, *Military Readiness and the Training of China's Sailors* (Stanford, CA: International Strategic Institute at Stanford, Center for International Security and Arms Control, 1989), 15, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 13.

future flayings of the radicals for obstructing naval development.”¹⁰⁹ Mao had only died in September; clearly Navy leadership was betting on a change in direction immediately.

Not everyone in the PLAN agreed with a change from a red navy to an expert navy during this period. A forced political reeducation program was initiated by the PLAN leadership in April 1978 which sent thousands of political officers to nearly all PLAN units to weed out those unwilling to shift from red to expert.¹¹⁰ This is a particularly interesting change in the use of the political arm of the PLAN from the purists of Karl-Marx ideology to Party officials doing the work of the Party. Although the political arm of the PLAN is seldom discussed in this thesis, this transition is notable when compared to their conduct during the Cultural Revolution. Even the political arm had to change during this critical period. Obviously not everyone was convinced to change internally, and the turnover of the PLAN officer corps from the “Young Schoolers” to the new technically inclined officers would not finish for many years.¹¹¹

This transition from red to expert in the PLAN is key to understanding this interlude generation. Taking a hypothetical PLAN officer commissioned in 1980, they are likely a product of technical training and a formal education possibly including some college. At the same time, their first commanding officers aboard ship were products of the old system that despised and publicly ridiculed experts. Again, not all of the senior

¹⁰⁹ Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 203.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹¹¹ The “Young Schoolers” are those Old Guard officers trained in the Young School ideology of a defensive maritime strategy that does not seek an advanced Navy for force projection means. Ibid., 204-206.

officers were against technically inclined individuals and processes, but a good number were if they had survived the Cultural Revolution. Clearly a young PLAN officer that entered after 1976 had experiences which were not the same as those officers that followed them or entered the PLAN before them. These aftershocks of the Cultural Revolution as Deng was changing direction are a hallmark of this social generation.

Rapprochement with the United States

China left the Cultural Revolution in a shockingly different world position than when it had entered it. Henry Kissinger believes that China started shifting politically towards the United States in 1965 but few, outside key leadership billets, in China could have known the level of change arising.¹¹² This would change noticeably starting at 1130 AM on February 21st 1972 when President Nixon would greet Zhou Enlai in Beijing with a large press corps in tail.¹¹³ The rapprochement between China and the United States was a historical moment for China in topics ranging from economics to defense. This statement would appear self-serving when coming from an American author, but all indications are that the formal realignment away from the Soviet Union toward the United States provided a bedrock by which China emerged as a powerful nation in the 21st Century. Chinese citizens within this social generation passed through their formative years when relations with the United States were becoming significantly more

¹¹² Kissinger, *On China*, 203.

¹¹³ President Richard Nixon's Daily Diary February 16, 1972-February 29, 1972, Box RC-9, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/PDD/1972/070%20February%2016-29%201972.pdf>.

positive while their parents most certainly were present for the anti United States propaganda of the past decades.

Certainly the United States was not an ally of China following the rapprochement, the last time this could be considered true was under Nationalist mainland rule in the 1940s. As an example of the transition during this period, an American military education delegation that visited a PLA Academy between April and May 1979 noted that an air defense teaching aid demonstrating how to down airplanes had an American jet as the target. When mentioned by the delegation, the “Chinese hosts appreciated the humour (sic) and said they would change it to a Soviet aircraft.”¹¹⁴

Sino-Vietnamese War

This generation would not experience the large scale and high intensity combat that most of their leaders within China experienced during the Second World War, Communist Revolution, and the Korean War.¹¹⁵ The one conflict it would participate in was the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War which is considered a failure. The reforms that would emerge as a result of the war however were not felt in earnest until several years later and are discussed in the following chapter. Mostly this delay is a reflection of China

¹¹⁴ William R. Heaton, Jr., “Professional Military Education in China: A Visit to the Military Academy of the People’s Liberation Army,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 81 (March 1980): 126.

¹¹⁵ For example of the general transition, only two of the sixty-five military members in the 17th CC “have substantial combat experience (both participated in ... [the] war with Vietnam in 1979)” in Cheng Li and Scott Harold, “China’s New Military Elite,” *China Security* 3, no. 4 (2007): 72.

wanting to appear strong and victorious in the limited war by not acknowledging that the conflict was not nearly as successful as expected.

From the PLAN perspective, little occurred in 1979 that required reform like that of the PLA and the PLA Air Force. The Vietnamese Navy was vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Chinese and there are no accounts of a Naval engagement during the war or explanation as to why there were none.¹¹⁶ What would have been on the minds of the PLAN during the brief war was the possibility of an engagement with the Soviet Navy that had been amassed a reinforced squadron near Vietnam. This force was originally placed as a deterrent and to show Soviet support for the Vietnamese government.¹¹⁷ No engagement between the PLAN and the Soviet Navy occurred due to a decision by Moscow to not becoming military involved.

The naval engagements and near-engagements typically referred to during this war were actually in late 1973 and early 1974 over two groups of islands which are returning in prominence, the Parcel and Spratly Islands.¹¹⁸ The small engagements during this period are an important part to any study of the current South China Sea tensions, but from a PLAN personnel perspective these small engagements had little value in terms of generational change. As an example, in order to commemorate the naval actions, a “twenty-page long poem that emphasized the role of the ‘people’s navy’ rather than the

¹¹⁶ King C. Chen, *China’s War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 103.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109-111.

¹¹⁸ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 268-269.

evident action of a relatively modern, technical naval force” was published shortly after the island conflicts that painted a David and Goliath image.¹¹⁹ Still in the Cultural Revolution, even this small naval engagement was painted in the light of a defensive action where victory was a result of the peoples superior will, not technical prowess. Clearly these incidents were not the catalysts for a modernization or significant change within the PLAN. That does not mean the PLAN would not later join the bandwagon of technical reforms in later years however.

PLAN Identity Crisis

PLAN officers recognized that the idea of a true people’s war at sea against major powers was simply unrealistic. One cannot simply defeat a heavily armed opponent with over the horizon weapons capability by sheer will and social ideology. Quantity certainly did not hurt, but some rudimentary skill was still required above that advocated by the Cultural Revolution’s leaders.¹²⁰ The problem was that as a minor service in the PLA, the PLAN had to abide by the national policies while providing the necessary deterrent to other nations. As discussed before, some of this dilemma was resolved by outwardly appearing revolutionary while internally attempting to salvage what they could. The

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 269.

¹²⁰ Similar sentiments were seen when visiting a PLA Academy: “The people with whom we met were acutely aware of China’s military deficiencies. They possessed a realistic sense of China’s capabilities.” Heaton, Jr., “Professional Military Education in China: A Visit to the Military Academy of the People’s Liberation Army,” 128.

shore-based sailors would perform the criticisms and revolutionary struggle on the behalf of the PLAN, but generally the “ships crews and naval pilots were not involved.”¹²¹

Some of these internal attempts to maintain a modern navy however would betray them, and sometimes publically. In May 1974, when the PLAN announced a new uniform change to one of maritime descent in lieu of the plain Mao shirts, see figure 5, that were devoid of all symbolism, Madame Mao attacked.¹²² This event in itself is not a paramount military event, but it illustrates the level of manipulation the PLAN, as an organization of people, had to overcome leaving the Cultural Revolution. Although Mao and the Central Committee had in 1974 “approved the change in naval uniforms, Chiang Ching (sic) [Madame Mao] frenziedly smeared the naval cadres and fighters who wore the new caps as ‘Kuomintang,’ ‘northern warlords,’ ‘Soviet revisionists,’ ‘tsarist Russians,’ ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘imperialists.’”¹²³

¹²¹ Harvey W. Nelsen, *The Chinese Military System: An Organizational Study of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 174.

¹²² Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 270.

¹²³ “Gang of Four Denounced for Opposing Powerful Navy,” *Peking NCNA Domestic Service*, March 14, 1977 in FBIS-CHI-77-51, 16 March 1977, E3.



Figure 5. PLAN Submarine Officer Training a Sailor (Pre-1974 Uniform Change)

Source: Official US Navy Photograph.

Instead of the classic Mao suit, PLAN officers were seen “wearing a Western-style hat (with visor, chin strap, and gold star), a white blouse resembling the U.S. Navy’s formal white tunic, and dark trousers.”¹²⁴ Although only a symbol, it was clear the Navy wanted to leave its people’s army on the sea mantra and begin to compete with the worlds major powers toe-to-toe. Eventually the PLAN would win this uniform battle, but only after direct intervention by Mao in 1975 to silence the naysayers.¹²⁵

From a strategic perspective, the role of the Navy was beginning to change during this transition period. During the Cultural Revolution, Madame Mao had “proposed that

¹²⁴ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 270.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

all the navy needed was a ‘reserve fleet for convoy purposes.’”¹²⁶ Her proposal did not even identify a coastal defense force: only a largely mothballed fleet for the express purpose of transporting the PLA. Comparing her statements to official views published within China in 1977 is revealing to show how the direction of the Navy was rapidly changed to being slightly expeditionary and able to compete in the region:

China’s coastline is more than 18,000 kilometers long. Before liberation, imperialists invaded us many times from the sea. At present, our wishes to liberate the sacred territory of our motherland, Taiwan Province, and recover Nansha and other islands have not yet been fulfilled. The two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, are frantically pursuing their ‘gunboat policy’ and vying for naval supremacy. The Soviet revisionists have not yet abandoned their desire to annihilate China. Faced with all these factors, we must further strengthen our navy and coastal defense.¹²⁷

Summarizing the close of the Cultural Revolution and what can be called the interregnum period, the PLAN was emerging from an identity crisis. It wanted to be a Navy, not just the Army’s Navy, nor just a navy fueled by ideology over machinery and technology. This desire appeared several times from under the veil of the Cultural Revolution but was often quickly suppressed. Finally, after the death of Mao and specifically the fall of the Gang of Four, it had the opportunity to rebrand itself. This generation experienced this rebranding in all respects from symbology to newfound naval strategic goals.

¹²⁶ “Gang of Four Denounced for Opposing Powerful Navy.” E1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., E2.

Generational Literature Review

As the generation that is currently the leadership within PLAN, PLA, and China broadly, almost all contemporary literature on Chinese social generations focuses on this group. Instead of providing an exhaustive comparison of all generational works that overlap this period, only those that detail different conclusions or ones with important caveats as to the key events of this generation follows. This is particularly challenging as most literature discusses what is commonly termed the fifth generation of leadership and is focused on China broadly. Clearly, a PLAN focused work will contain many more detailed events above and beyond China level works. Becker provides the only exception to this by focusing on the PLAN leadership specifically and is discussed last.

Willy Wo-Lap Lam, when looking at the broad leadership that emerged from this generation, argues that “the single most important influence in their lives and careers is probably Deng Xiaoping’s era of reform rather than earlier events such as the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976.”¹²⁸ If one was forced to chose a single event, I would also agree this PLAN generation better related to the reforms that would follow Deng’s rise than the events from earlier. However, instead of choosing a singular event and grouping this small generation with others, I chose to acknowledge both influences.

There can be no doubt that those that held onto the past mental model were largely purged, as discussed earlier, but that does not eradicate the experiences of the Cultural Revolution. Only the generational unit that looked backwards was pared down

¹²⁸ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “The Generation After Next in Chinese Politics,” in *China’s Leadership in the 21st Century: The Rise of the Fourth Generation*, ed. David Michael Finkelstein and Maryanne Kivlehan (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2003), 251.

from the PLAN. Recall that generations are not defined by the opinions of a group of people. The groups that form as a result of differing views on shared experiences of a particular generation are called generational units. Therefore, I disagree with attempting to group this generation with another generation based on the dominant opinion that ultimately formed within the earlier generation. From a sociology basis, terminology is important to ensure clarity.

Another work that is particularly interesting in terms of generation formation within China is a study completed for the British Journal of Sociology that discusses the intellectual Chinese youth coming of age during this period. To be clear, this work is not intended to look at the PLA in any manner, it's a sociology study that uses Mannheim's works to understand better how the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests may have started. As a study on Chinese educated youth during this period, it is particularly revealing. PLAN officers would have to of been educated as well and the intellectuals discussed came from the same pool of youth which the officers were recruited from. Ruth Cherrington, the author, eventually concludes in her study that the "intellectual youth of the 1980s, the focus of study, were identified as a generation of Chinese intellectuals with its own internal divisions or intra-generational units. It is possible that so many different units can be identified that a shared generational consciousness is difficult to perceive with no clear concrete groups, as Mannheim recognized."¹²⁹

Simply put, Cherrington was able to define this group of people who completed their lower level schooling in the mid to late 1970s as a generation that was distinct from

¹²⁹ Cherrington, "Generational Issues in China: A Case Study of the 1980s Generation of Young Intellectuals," 318.

those before and after, but argued they left with highly fractured views on the world; drawing any sweeping conclusions based on their experiences would be tenuous at best. For the purposes of this thesis, her conclusions agree that a generation exists following the death of Mao but before the Deng reforms were in force. I must challenge however the fractured aspect of the generation in her conclusions when we transition the argument to the PLAN. As discussed in chapter 3, the PLAN is not Chinese society in general and members are filtered during the entrance process and during their tenure based on their world views. The PLAN is a political entity. Therefore, I believe if the data set was limited to PLAN officers only, her conclusions that “no clear concrete groups” exist is likely not true for the PLAN. Based on the limitations of this thesis discussed in chapter 1, I will not go further by justifying possible generational units in the PLAN.

The last work that merits discussion is that of Becker which focuses on the elite leadership of the PLAN. The generational analysis of this work split the current leadership into three different generations. The first generation is outside the chronological scope of this work and only included 14 people at time of publishing in 2013.¹³⁰ The second and third generation in the Becker work when combined largely represent this chapters generation with some notable exceptions. As discussed in chapter 3, the level of detail that can be used in generation definition is somewhat subject to the author and the granularity desired. Becker was only looking at the senior leadership in the PLAN and therefore he found some gain in this additional effort. Table 2 is the summary

¹³⁰ Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy*, 33.

table as provided in the document for ready comparison. It highlights the key events for each social generation of PLAN leadership presented by Becker.

Table 2. PLAN Leadership Generations

Joined PLA	Key events during officers' early careers
Generation 1 Mid to late 1960s	The World: Growing tensions in Sino-Soviet relations China: Nation-wide political factionalism and social violence PLA: Professional Military Education (PME) system shut down PLA Navy: Focus on coastal defense
Generation 2 Early to mid 1970s	The World: Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia; Sino-Vietnam War; U.S.-China relations established China: Social violence begins to decline; political factionalism continues PLA: Rudimentary PME system reestablished PLA Navy: Early stages of PLA Navy reforms
Generation 3 Late 1970s to early 1980s	The World: Relaxation of international tensions; end of the Cold War China: Start of market based reforms PLA: PME system fully established; focus on military modernization and professionalism PLA Navy: Changes in navy orientation from coastal defense to near seas

Source: Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2013), 33.

Looking at Generation 2 in table 2, we can see all of the events from each of the four vantage points were included in our analysis. Many of the points in this thesis went into more specific historical detail or provided slightly different terminology, but there are no missing areas. As an example, the island chain disputes in the mid-1970s was included in this thesis's analysis under the Sino-Vietnam War header since they are often viewed as a precursor to the eventual war. There are no disagreements.

The Generation 3 of the Becker work is less congruent with what has been presented in this thesis. This author believes much of this has to do with Becker's work

not continuing further chronologically and this thesis ending the generation at 1981—barely into the 1980s. Effectively, if the Becker Generation 3 was split down the center, the first half would fit with what has been presented, and the second half resides largely in the next chapter that presents the results of Deng’s rise.

There are reasons for these differences. As an example, this author believes it is too far to say that the end of the Cold War in 1989 was a major event for a PLAN officer that joined in the late 1970s. This event is 10 years after their formative years. Furthermore, this author agrees that market reforms were important but the research indicates they didn’t really begin in earnest until the early 1980s. Instead of saying they were key events in these PLAN officer’s early years, this author notes that they had to oversee the transition to the market based economy. Similarly, this author presents the turn to professionalism in the next generation, not this one. Although some improvements in education have been made by the late 1970s, the real turn has not quite taken hold at this point based on how this author defined his generations.

This author does not desire to say that the Becker work is incorrect in its generational demarcation points. He was looking at the generational model from a senior leadership only perspective. Instead, what this chapter has presented is that when a person widens their aperture to all of the PLAN officer corps, the distinctions between groups is better demarcated by the time a policies were in force, not just initiated.

Conclusion

This period (1976 to 1981) can accurately be considered that of transition at the end of a decade of extreme social turmoil. It is important to note that at least two generational units will form within it as a symptom of this. History has shown that the

economic reform minded generational unit dominated, but a portion of the population would have left this period believing that the Gang of Four was correct and eternal revolution was the answer.¹³¹ We could coin terms such as rightest and leftist for these groups, but little is gained within this thesis by dividing up the factions within the generation. Those that were largely non-conformal were almost certainly purged from the leadership roles by this point. The important fact is that this generation had two broad distinctions—those that look forward and those who looked back for the answers to their problems. Both groups are united in their actual experiences however and therefore the culmination of the cultural revolution is a concrete experience for this generation.

The major transitions that occurred over this 5-year period are illustrated within Figure 6 and were discussed in this chapter. Almost all aspects of life for a PLAN officer had changed in this period ranging from the economic policy to the Navy's strategic goals. None of the new policies had firmly taken grip yet, that would occur in the 1980s, but it demonstrates the magnitude of changes occurring. Reflecting back upon the requirements for a generation, we can see that PLAN officers entering the PLAN between 1976 and 1981 experienced important and distinct events that are unique to it. They truly are a generation of their own.

¹³¹ Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre*, 111-112.

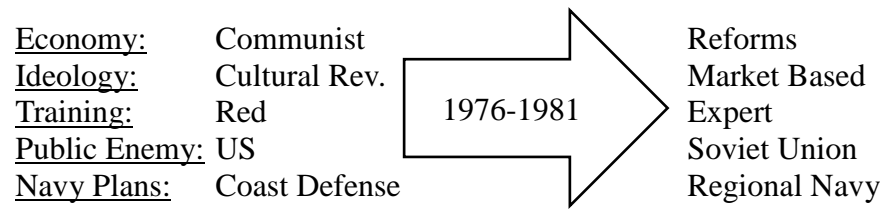


Figure 6. Summary of 1976–1981 Generation Transitions

Source: Created by Author

CHAPTER 6

DENG XIAOPING REFORMS CHINA (1982-1999)

If we had to fight a war now we couldn't afford to have our officers ignorant of modern warfare. . . . Today they must have knowledge—knowledge about warfare in the air, on the ground, under the ground, and under water, including communications and liaison.¹³²

— Deng Xiaoping, *in a 1980 speech*

Introduction

China experienced an extreme course change in its economic and military policies shortly after Deng Xiaoping consolidated power. Leaving an era that glorified the peasant farmer struggling against capitalist urbanites required notable financial and political capital. With the second sufficiently in hand due to Mao's death and the fall of the Gang of Four, the financing to jump start economic changes was all that remained. However, in order for China to emerge on the world scene economically within the next few decades, it would have to redirect significant money into its own industry in spite of competing priorities. China certainly had sufficient manpower. What it lacked was materials that would start to unlock the underutilized population and generate goods that could be sold on the international markets.

One of the most notable expenditures that could be shored up to pay for Deng's long sought after economic jump-start was the PLA which consumed 17.5 percent of all

¹³² Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982*, 274.

government outlays in 1979.¹³³ Conveniently, the PLA had also performed poorly during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War which provided ample justification for downsizing and professionalizing the forces in the near-term. Furthermore, with the rapprochement to the United States and the emergence of a credible domestic nuclear capability, China no longer required an army solely built on mass to ward off outside superpowers. The PLA was therefore ripe for changes that would affect every soldier and officer within all branches of the PLA.

This chapter separates each of the major events that affected the experiences of a PLAN officers due to the reforms notably from 1985 to the turn of the millennium. Although on a macro scale Deng's reforms were focused on China's international power and increasing the quality of life domestically, these actions translated into significant second order impacts on those in the PLAN. Each topic is separated into its own section to better analyze the event and its impacts, but are tied back together in the summary to show how the changes mutually reinforced each other. The combined effects would manifest in 2000 requiring another change in course partially due the unintended impacts resulting from the manifestation of these policies.

It is important to remember that this chapter is not designed to summarize the events between 1982 and 1999. The focus is upon the policies put into place near the beginning of this period that created generally shared experiences for those within the PLAN officer corps during the entire time span. A specific event during that time that

¹³³ Paul Humes Folta, *From Swords to Plowshares?: Defense Industry Reform in the PRC* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 19.

changes notably the experiences of the average PLAN officer would in fact be a challenge to this chapter's presentation of a 17-year generation.

Commercializing the PLA

The PLA budget was notably slashed nearly every year following the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War until 1989 when it started to stabilize. Figure 7 shows how the budget was halved over the ten-year period between the end of the war and the Tiananmen Square protests. Some of this can be accounted for in the reduction in troop numbers and the changing strategic outlook that will be latter discussed, but much of these savings were offset by increased technology, equipment, and education costs. The funding for the PLA would have to come from within the PLA itself if it was to remain a viable force and attract quality officers.

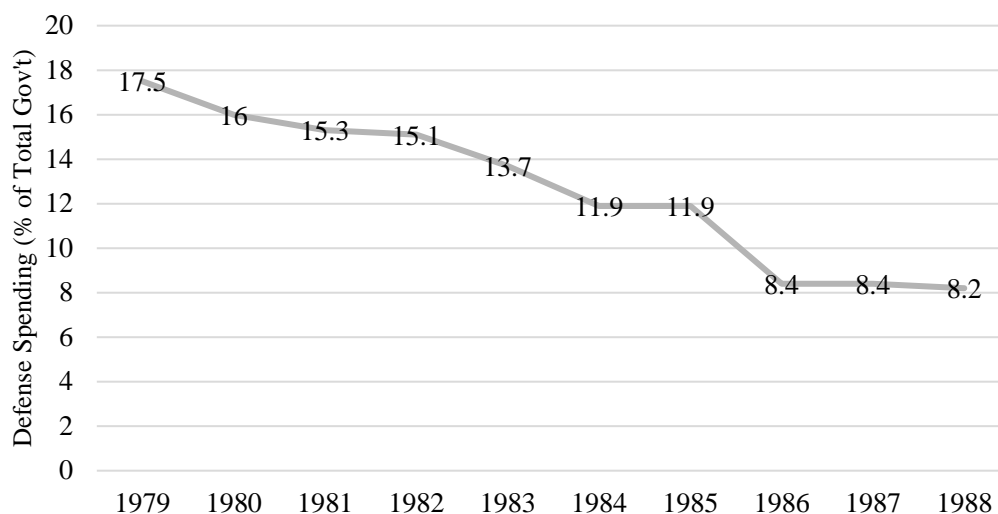


Figure 7. Defense Spending as Percentage of Total Government Spending

Source: Graphic created by author. Data from Paul Humes Folta, *From Swords to Plowshares?: Defense Industry Reform in the PRC* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 19, 216-217.

The solution was a logical outcome of the market-based reforms requiring the budget cuts; the PLA would have to manage its own for-profit businesses producing military, agricultural, and consumer goods. Officially sanctioned on May 4th 1985, the PLA was not only directed to manage its own businesses, it was even provided details such as what types of business were preferred and if family dependents were to be used.¹³⁴ The PLA had run businesses of various types since nearly its inception in keeping with the idea of an independent people's army that did not need high levels of funding or supplies in peacetime.¹³⁵ Its level of self-reliance had increased in the years between 1979 and 1985, but these were largely outgrowths of existing projects in agriculture. What changed in 1985 was that the PLA no longer was limited to producing food for its own consumption and for local markets; it was expected to manufacture consumer goods for global sales.¹³⁶

The first Defense White Paper published by the Chinese government, similar to the National Security Strategy for the United States, in 1998 highlights how pervasive the subordination of the PLA was to be the economic interests of China during this period: "China is now confronted with the extremely heavy task of economic construction, so the work in defense must be subordinate to and in the service of the nation's overall

¹³⁴ Tai Ming Cheung, *China's Entrepreneurial Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31-33.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-25.

¹³⁶ The commercializing of PLA agricultural production between 1979 and 1985 is discussed in James C. Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-Business Complex, 1978-1998* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 52-55.

economic construction.”¹³⁷ By 2004, the narrative in the Defense White Paper transitions to an increasingly military dominant position.¹³⁸ This subsequent change at the turn of the century will be discussed further in chapter 7, but the tone of the 1998 Defense White Paper demonstrates how the PLA endured significant reductions for nearly two decades to better the nation’s economy overall.

As a government entity, the PLA owned businesses received multiple advantages over civilian production which furthered their profit level.¹³⁹ Advantages included: advanced technology access, guaranteed purchases, superior labor force, inside market information, and better financial resource access. The output of PLA owned and operated facilities would no longer be a small figure, but would account for as much as 2 percent of the national GDP during its peak.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the profits were to be largely retained at the small unit level with a large portion used for “improving living standards” and “building barracks.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Information Office of the State Council Of the People’s Republic of China, “National Defense Policy,” *China’s National Defense - July 1998*, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/5/5.2.htm>.

¹³⁸ Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, 7-8. This work compares the 2000 and 2004 Defense White Papers.

¹³⁹ Foltz, *From Swords to Plowshares?*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁰ Cheung, *China’s Entrepreneurial Army*, 62.

¹⁴¹ Thirty percent of profits were sent to higher level military authorities in 1986. The remainder was either put back into the businesses or used for projects mentioned above. *Ibid.*, 38.

PLAN Commercial Endeavors

The PLAN's involvement in commercial industry during this period was radically different than what most conventional Navies are authorized; it went far beyond independent subsidiaries. That is not to say one particular model is most appropriate, but rather to acknowledge how different the experience of a PLAN officer at a naval base must have been during this period. The most often referred to commercial outgrowth of the PLAN was that it "had its own shipping fleet that used naval vessels and operated out of naval ports."¹⁴² This was a logical business endeavor for the Navy, they already have sea access and loading capabilities, yet its impact on the military waterfront must have been notable.

The PLAN commercial shipping business was also one of the first of the major cases of corruption involving these new PLA businesses. In 1985, Hainan Island was found to have imported significant quantities of goods for illegal resale at great profits. PLAN ships had need used for the shipping.¹⁴³ The case was widely published domestically with uncharacteristically detailed accounts of the illegal trade and its costs to society. The following excerpts are from a translated article distributed by Xinhua within China at the time of the investigation that highlight the scale. It is important to note importing was supposed to be minimized:

¹⁴² Ibid., 69, 110.

¹⁴³ The article cited later refers only broadly to units, the clarification that they are discussing PLAN ships is explained in other sources such as Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune*, 61; Cheung, *China's Entrepreneurial Army*, 185.

More than 89,000 motor vehicles (over 90 percent were sedans and vans) and component parts; 2.86 million television sets, including component parts; 252,000 videotape recorders, including component parts; and 122,000 motorcycle [were approved for purchase by import.]

84 of the 94 departments and bureaus [in Hainan] have all become motor vehicle dealers. Following the examples of the administrative regional organs, all the counties, cities, departments, and even schools, and kindergartens have become car dealers.¹⁴⁴

Two concepts stand out from those excerpts: commercialization extended to every organization within China and using funds for construction could easily be misappropriated to serve profiteering groups in the government. The corruption in Hainan extended far beyond that of the PLAN and appears to have consumed the entire province, but it was made possible partially through the ability of the PLAN to smuggle goods on ships. This challenge of being a profiting organization with unique levels of access to locations and goods must have played on PLAN officers minds and perceptions of the world.

Another interesting endeavor was that the PLAN operated one of the ten largest military enterprises (No. 4804) in China which was responsible for “shipbuilding and ship repair.”¹⁴⁵ As a consumer for ships and requiring continuous repair, it is not clear how the PLAN was able to effectively lead a company by which they profited from while paying the company for its goods.

¹⁴⁴ “Further Reportage on Hainan Profiteering Case,” *Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service*, July 31, 1985 in FBIS-CHI-85-151, 6 August 1985, P1-P11.

¹⁴⁵ Cheung, *China’s Entrepreneurial Army*, 62.

Combat Readiness Implications

As to those within the PLA broadly, we can see how dramatically the business relationships impacted the military is with a series of statistics. From an operational readiness and unit cohesion perspective, the classic role of a standing army and navy is to train and prepare for armed conflicts. However following the authorization of military for-profit companies, “it was common for between 20 per cent to one-third of personnel from grass-roots military units, especially those stationed in coastal regions, to be fully engaged in commercial activities at any one time.”¹⁴⁶ The use of military personnel in the new markets was not limited only to physical labor and management of labor either. Approximately three-quarters of military lecturers at PLA academies “had second jobs or were looking for part-time work” in 1993.¹⁴⁷ The PLA had truly embraced the 1985 call to create its own businesses that unlocked the entrepreneurial side of the armed forces.

It is difficult to summarize exactly what the commercialization of the PLAN meant for a PLAN officer in their formative years. Clearly, the PLAN had become more than just a classical military organization as seen in Western nations. The force had become partially self-sustaining by subordinating its ambitions of a blue water navy to that of the overall national economic growth. As with any for-profit organization, there was some level of corruption and profiteering within the officer ranks of the PLAN. The ability of the PLAN to conduct its primary mission of combat was reduced but ultimately would not matter since it would not be called into a major conflict during this period.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 192. The limit was 5 percent, but was “universally ignored.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 193.

At the same time, the officer's skills in management in a competitive environment should have outpaced their Western counterparts. More money was simply not available to fulfill their naval ambitions: the PLAN would have to both use what it had wisely and earn as much as feasible.

Downsizing into a Professional Force

The simultaneous downsizing and professionalizing of the PLA had its roots in the financial pressures of the economic reforms, changes in warfare, and recognition of poor PLA performance during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War. The downsizing and the professionalizing of the PLA are looked at separately to demonstrate their impacts on the PLAN officers that remained and those that entered the service during this period.

PLA Downsizing

The PLA downsized notably starting from 1981 through the end of the decade, ultimately falling in size from approximately 4.75 million to 2.5 million by the turn of the millennium.¹⁴⁸ Figure 8 provides a graphical representation of the decrease in total PLA strength, which includes the PLAN, over the period as it compared to PLAN standalone strength. Recognizing the PLAN is such a minor portion of the total PLA force size, the percentage of total active PLA manpower that is in the PLAN is shown as well. Note that the PLAN is maintained at nearly 9 percent of the total force throughout this period. The localized peaking and fluctuations are largely a function of the limited ability to

¹⁴⁸ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1981-1982* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), 73; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1999/2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186.

accurately estimate PLA force strength in a given year, and the overall trend is the locus of this discussion on general downsizing.

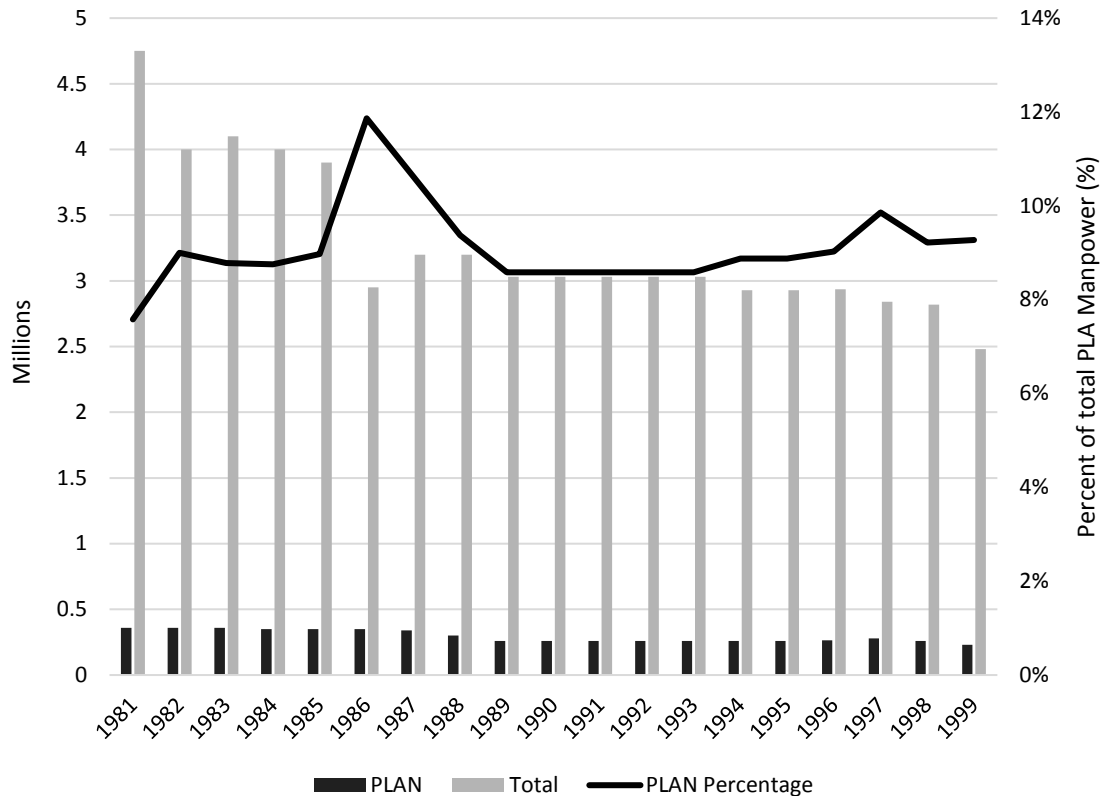


Figure 8. PLA and PLAN Active Manpower Downsizing

Source: Graphic created by author. Data from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, years 1981-2000).

The downsizing of the PLA required significant effort to return the vast numbers of military personnel to society with sufficient jobs. Several of these transitions were simplified by taking their former roles such as the “170,000 officers and men of the ten . . . divisions of the Railway Corps” and making them civilian employees under a new

civilian structure.¹⁴⁹ Others were simply required to retire or leave the military and obtain a civilian job.

Professionalizing the PLAN

Defining professionalization of a military in a hotly contested item when analyzing a non-Western military. In lieu of developing a theory of what exactly defines Chinese professionalization followed by a methodical defense of it through a series of detailed analysis, this thesis accepts the conclusions of the preponderance of existing works on this topic. There is value in developing a definition of military professionalism and using it as a measuring stick, and this author endorses those who are interested in these discussions to dive further into the sources noted within this section. However, this section will be, by design, a summary of other works conclusions on PLA professionalism, augmented with PLAN specific examples and highlighting transitional dates.

James Mulvenon's 1997 aptly named study for RAND titled *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps* conducts a thorough literature review on professionalism and is supported by significant quantitative analysis. Published at the end of this chapter's generational span as a look backwards, it concludes:

Virtually all previous studies of the Chinese military agree that the post-Mao PLA officer corps is becoming more professionalized . . . disagreement centers on the pace and scope of professionalization, and to the extent to which

¹⁴⁹ Yitzhak Shichor, "Demobilization: The Dialectics of PLA Troop Reduction," in *China's Military in Transition*, ed. David L. Shambaugh and Richard H. Yang (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 79.

political control of the military by the Chinese Communist Party impedes or enhances it.¹⁵⁰

Like most works that focus on China, much of the information and data in Mulvenon's work is focused on the senior leadership, but there are elements that demonstrate general officer trends through the ranks to include those entering the PLA during this time. For example, the "proportion of PME graduates or college-educated officers increased from . . . 2 percent [in 1982] to 41 percent [by 1987] at the regimental level."¹⁵¹ As the lowest unit level discussed in Mulvenon's work, this statistic reinforces this thesis's argument that real effects in relation to education and therefore professionalization truly started to change around 1982, not at the death of Mao in 1976. Although the schools had started to reopen as discussed in the previous chapter, their impacts would not be felt until around 1982 when the new officers started to arrive in actual PLA units.

Education in the PLA extended beyond just the commissioning requirements at this time as well. The PLA created graduate level education programs at several of the academies starting in 1985 and would rapidly expand the program.¹⁵² An August 1985 article discussing one of the first groups of postgraduate students noted that "the last time the PLA recruited postgraduate students for its military academy was 30 years ago."¹⁵³ The elimination of the graduate education for the PLA predated the Cultural Revolution

¹⁵⁰ Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps*, 8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵² Kamphausen, Scobell, and Tanner, *The "People" in the PLA*, 32-33.

¹⁵³ Xiangnan Chen, "Military Academy Recruits Postgraduate Students," *Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service*, August 7, 1985, in FBIS-CHI-85-154, 9 August 1985, K5.

by a decade, but was restored within a decade of its conclusion. The PLA of the future would require more than just ideology to be an effective fighting force, and the turn to education is a symbol of the desire for professionalism.

Ellis Joffe, a prominent PLA analyst that published extensively during this period, also agrees that the rise of Deng is the demarcation point in the PLA for professionalism. Specifically, “military modernization was resumed, army units disengaged from political entanglement and the role of politics in the army was downgraded. This provided the setting for the second flowering of professionalism—much greater and longer than the first [in the 1950s].”¹⁵⁴ One thing that distinguishes Joffe’s work from that of most others is that he willingly discusses why he believes the 1989 Tiananmen crisis is overplayed in terms of its long-term impact on the PLA. Some even question if it’s a reflection of unprofessionalism in the PLA. It is only appropriate to briefly address this well-known event, by those in the Western world, at this point and specifically why it’s not a significant event in terms of the current PLAN as perceived by its officer corps.

1989 Tiananmen Square Crisis

The symbolic photograph of the tank column about to run down a lone student protestor is perhaps better known by most Westerners than even the Cultural Revolution and the suffering it caused. I certainly will not defend the brutal actions taken by the PLA in the square, but in order for the event to be generationally significant, it has to have been significant for the preponderance of PLAN officers. The level of censorship in

¹⁵⁴ Ellis Joffe, “Party-Army Relations in China: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *China’s Military in Transition*, ed. David L. Shambaugh and Richard H. Yang (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 40.

regards to this event makes any consideration of it as a key event, with the possible exception of those directly involved, dubious at best. Furthermore, in an unbiased view into the actions of the PLA, its not clear this action is unprofessional.

The shooting of students by armed forces is abhorrent, but the PLA's loyalty to the party and its orders (with some exceptions) is a measure of professionalism from the perspective of China at the time. Joffe concludes his look at the incident and its effects on the PLA as follows:

That the orders were distasteful to many officers is also beyond doubt. But did the PLA have a choice? Would disobedience have made it professional? In the final analysis, it behaved in a disciplined fashion. Its action was reprehensible, but that does not make it unprofessional. It was the nature of the system rather than nature of the PLA that accounts for the tragedy.¹⁵⁵

Those from outside China must remember that the PLA is truthfully not the armed forces of China. It is the armed forces of the Chinese Communist Party, which happens to be the only party that exists legally within China and therefore is that in power. Actions against the party, are offenses against what the PLA defends—the party.

Questionable officers that were within the PLA in any location at the time of the Tiananmen Square incident, particularly the more junior ones, were investigated and removed if necessary.¹⁵⁶ Specific to the PLAN, approximately “100 PLA naval cadets marched through Tiananmen Square in full uniform” in apparent support of the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵⁶ “As many as 3,500 PLA commanders were investigated after the Tiananmen Square incident.” “The party believed its investigations and punishments necessary because 111 PLA officers had ‘breached discipline in a serious way.’” Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 268.

students.¹⁵⁷ From a PLA generational look, it is reasonable to assume the majority of those PLA officers (to include PLAN officers) that were outwardly sympathetic with the students were purged from the ranks. A review by this author of a significant number of PLA and PLAN focused works published after 2000, to allow some buffer from the incident itself, showed nearly nothing is mentioned of it except those select works dedicated to the topic. Almost all mentions that were found discuss the sanctions that resulted internationally and their impacts on weapons procurement rather than actual impacts domestically within China. Several authors go so far as to focus on the funding that was provided to the armed police units as a result, but again nothing notable in terms of recruiting or perception ultimately. Therefore, there is no indication that a true long-term wide-ranging impact of the Tiananmen Square events of 1989 exists in the present PLAN officer corps.

PLAN Specific Professionalism

The PLAN saw changes in its professionalism beyond just education and training. During the Cultural Revolution, jury rigging of ships was a common practice not out of fiscal necessity, but as a means to further the political ideology of the time. Swanson does not mince words on the subject: “A calculated lawlessness ensued as rules and procedures were held up to ridicule . . . vital ship-maintenance policies became a succession of mass tidal waves based upon the confrontation between those who favored

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Scobell, “Why the People’s Army Fired on the People: The Chinese Military and Tiananmen,” *Armed Forces and Society* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 200.

technical standardization and those who saw it as anti-Maoist.”¹⁵⁸ Not only were PLAN officers of the Cultural Revolution less professional by their education and military training, but they also had to accept a system of ship maintenance and construction that reduced their combat effectiveness. The rise of technical expertise following the end of the Cultural Revolution corrected this slide into organized chaos and resulted in a complete reversal of policies. There can be no doubt that from the material perspective, the PLAN became more professional once Deng’s policies had taken hold.

The rise of nuclear ships and the corresponding nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines in the PLAN during this period is also noteworthy. To be clear, nuclear programs were less affected by the Cultural Revolution than other aspects of the PLA, but were still “seriously hampered.”¹⁵⁹ The strategic impacts of China having nuclear weapons is discussed later in this chapter, but the professionalism aspect within the PLAN is important. Building, maintaining, and operating nuclear powered submarines that carry nuclear tipped ballistic missiles is not a task that can be completed by a Navy with a culture of jury rigging.

On 12 October 1982, China launched its first domestically built submarine launched ballistic missile (JL-1) from a non-nuclear powered “submerged Golf-class

¹⁵⁸ Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, 250-251.

¹⁵⁹ Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 13.

submarine.”¹⁶⁰ The domestically produced Xia-class nuclear powered submarine launched the JL-1 on September 15th 1988, completing the components of an at sea nuclear deterrent.¹⁶¹ Few details exist on the life and nature of those involved in this part of the PLAN, but as a nuclear submariner this author can assert that this task would have required an extreme departure from the nature of the PLAN during the Cultural Revolution. At sea nuclear deterrent capability requires long range reliable communication system, significant maintenance and operational requirements, and a professional officer corps that could be trusted at sea with such destructive power and little direct oversight. None of this would have existed under the Navy as envisioned by Madame Mao or those driving the Cultural Revolution.

Downsizing and Professionalizing Conclusions

The PLAN, like all of the PLA, downsized significantly throughout this period but retained approximately the same percentage of total manpower. A multitude of reasons drove the ultimate downsizing, but it also allowed funding to be reallocated towards creating a more professional force. Specific to the officers of the PLA, the restoration of and ultimate increase in standards of professional military training are apparent artifacts of this shift. The belief that this shift towards professionalization started in the early to mid 1980s is widely accepted by PLA experts. This shift in expectations and training, while reneging on the concept of a massive people’s army at sea, are

¹⁶⁰ Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China’s Future Nuclear Submarine Force: Insights from Chinese Writings,” *Naval War College Review* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 69.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

important changes that impacted PLAN officers in the formative years in this period. This was illustrated by both the shift from jury-rigging of maintenance and the rise of the at sea nuclear deterrent.

Strategic Outlook Changes

The Chinese were largely supported by the Soviets outwardly until the later 1970s with the rapprochement with the United States. In truth, the Sino-Soviet relationship had soured much earlier but was hidden below the surface.¹⁶² The previous chapter delved into the propaganda changes within China in regards to the position of the United States. This chapter, several years after the international relationship changes were noticeable, includes a brief discussion on the impacts of the rapprochement from the perspective of the strategic military implications. These changes are important because it allowed the PLA broadly to conduct its downsizing and professionalizing it.

China first obtained nuclear weapons in 1964, tested its first nuclear missiles in 1966, and finally exploded its first the hydrogen bomb in 1967.¹⁶³ Although always proclaiming to not use the weapons as a first strike weapon, it was clear that the intent was to add additional pause to any country planning to coerce China. Joffe makes a

¹⁶² The need for improvement in Sino-US relations is explained in Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 36-39; The move towards a more neutral approach with the US was to establish a more “equidistant policy” with all the super powers. See David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 128.

¹⁶³ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 174-175.

convincing argument that China did not fear a full scale nuclear attack from the Soviets or a conventional assault on mainland China—both were improbable. The true threat to China was a limited nuclear strike used to force a particular action. Shifting towards a more neutral position with the United States would reduce the risk of such an attack by the Soviets.¹⁶⁴

The ability of China to invade Vietnam in 1979, a Soviet ally, without a conventional retaliation by the Soviet Union was the litmus test for the combination of nuclear weapons and remaining semi-neutral with the superpowers. Using this history, Deng was able to argue that a “new world war was not inevitable and nuclear war no longer seemed imminent.”¹⁶⁵ The need for a large scale peoples army was no longer, the army—and navy—would downsize and modernize due to the change in China’s strategic position. Using diplomacy, China was able to reduce its strategic risk and allow a reduction in conventional forces.

Conclusion

Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power started a momentous change in China in almost every endeavor. His early efforts were limited in their impact for a multitude of reasons to include not being named Mao’s successor, the propaganda of the Gang of Four, and the fact that countries cannot change overnight. The fact that China was on a new path for the coming decades is clear by 1982. Specific to the PLA and the PLAN, the impacts of the decreasing budget, downsizing of the armed forces, increased demand for

¹⁶⁴ Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao*, 37-39.

¹⁶⁵ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 247.

professional officers, and a change in the strategic vision of the world is apparent. An officer joining the PLAN in 1985 had a vastly different formative experience than an officer who joined in 1977. In fact, that same officer from 1977 would very likely have not been accepted into the PLAN in 1985 due to their lack of education which was now required for all.

This generation, the one that rose following the interregnum period where Deng consolidated power would continue until the turn of the millennium. These reforms would have second and third order impacts requiring a strong shift in policy again at that point. Make no mistake, the PLAN officers that entered later in this generation (for example in 1995) were better educated and more professional than those at the beginning, but the policies and trends were now set. The inflection point of change was in the rear view mirror. These new officers were just a more perfect product of the same system as these ideas took greater hold.

CHAPTER 7

CHINA ENTERS THE NEW MILENIUM (2000-PRESENT)

The Navy is working to build itself into a modern maritime force of operation consisting of combined arms with both nuclear and conventional means of operations. Taking informationization as the goal and strategic focus in its modernization drive, the Navy gives high priority to the development of maritime information systems, and new-generation weaponry and equipment . . . Efforts are being made to improve and reform training programs and methods to intensify training in joint integrated maritime operations. The Navy is enhancing research into the theory of naval operations and exploring the strategy and tactics of maritime people's war under modern conditions.

— 2006 Chinese National Defense White Paper

Introduction

The turn of the millennium was a pivotal moment for the PLAN due to events that had been put into motion decades before. The transition was not a reflection of a master 21st Century PLAN plan or an arbitrarily defined point in time by which the PLA decided to reform. Many of the notable changes were products of recent events and the second order effects of policies put into place at the onset of the previous generation. To be clear, the year 2000 was also not selected in this chapter as the point of change to simply provide a convenient narrative that the new millennium brought in a new generation. Simply put, it is the right point to demarcate the transition.

Placing China into a world context since the start of the last generation to the turn of the millennium, a great deal of events had occurred which had started to change the thinking of the PLAN and its outlook. The Soviet Union had collapsed and many of the former Soviet states were absorbed or were in the process of being absorbed into NATO. The doomsday clock had been rolled back as far as “17 minutes to midnight” in 1991

reflecting the reduced international tensions.¹⁶⁶ The internet was exploding in developed nations worldwide unlocking massive computer to computer information transfer capabilities at low cost.

Within China, the policies put into motion by Deng Xiaoping were coming to fruition as China's economy expanded. "Made in China" consumer products lined shelves of stores across the world and the trade deficits were becoming a point of friction. It is with this background that this chapter now addresses the changes that would occur specific to the PLA and PLAN that would birth a new PLAN generation.

PLA Businesses Curbed

Deng Xiaoping's unlocking of the business spirit within the PLA which reduced the national fiscal outlays required to support the PLA had reached its culminating point in the late 1990s. Jiang Zemin, Deng's effective successor, had "insisted back in the early 1990s that the armed forces . . . should be dependent on government appropriations to cover their fiscal needs," but was limited to the status quo due to the "inadequate levels of state funding."¹⁶⁷ The funding was now available, as Deng had predicted, since the commercialization of China was now established. The level of corruption and smuggling from the PLA business had reached levels that were detrimental both economically and politically. From the political aspect, the two decades of fiscal semi-autonomy of the

¹⁶⁶ Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "Doomsday Clock Timeline," accessed April 14, 2016, <http://thebulletin.org/timeline>.

¹⁶⁷ Cheung, *China's Entrepreneurial Army*, 251.

PLA had implications beyond the costs savings, the party control was not as firm as desired by Beijing. For all these reasons, it was clear that the control of private enterprises for profit needed to end.

The methodical termination of PLA businesses started in July 1998 in a speech by Jiang Zemin.¹⁶⁸ Although some directives had been issued earlier, Jiang had sped up the timeline significantly such that in March 2000, the campaign to divest the PLA from commercial industries was declared complete.¹⁶⁹ In truth, not all business ties had been yet severed, but with 19,459 entities disbanded by July 2000, significant progress had indeed been made.¹⁷⁰ The nature of the PLA, including the PLAN, was rapidly changed to a force fully dependent of the central government for everything.

From the perspective of the PLA officers, this change was significant and relatively sudden. The subsidies from the PLA run businesses had “accounted for between 10 per cent to as much as 50 per cent of regular salaries” and was effectively eliminated.¹⁷¹ There were some pay increases to compensate, but are understood to have been insufficient with the overall loss. This would manifest itself finally in a July 2006 pay raise across all officer and NCO ranks “ranging between 80 and 100 percent.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 250.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁷² Kristen Gunness and Fred Vellucci, “Reforming the Officer Corps: Keeping the College Grads In, the Peasants Out, and the Incompetent Down,” in *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military*, ed. Roy

Clearly the gap in pay had reached a critical point when it had to be practically doubled overnight. Ultimately, for those officers entering the PLA after 2000, their pay was now a product of the government only. No longer would there be subsidies from the businesses.

Corruption and smuggling of goods had been rampant in the PLA businesses. Whereas this was largely accepted as part of a for-profit model, the need to accept it was diminishing. It is not fair to say that all members of the PLA were taking kickbacks and maintaining illegal schemes, but the numbers were not trivial. Of just the cases of smuggling uncovered by Chinese customs in 1998, the amount of goods involved were valued at 15.4 billion Chinese Yuan (several billion US dollar equivalent).¹⁷³ A significant amount of the smuggling occurred through the port cities. Recall that the PLAN operated its own shipping companies which were sometimes caught directly involved in the smuggling. There can be no doubt that the shutdown of military businesses directly impacted the scale of and general acceptance of corruption in the PLAN.

As previously discussed, the transition to a government led pay system that removed the for-profit business ventures had very real impacts on party patronage and loyalty of the force. It is critical to remember the PLA is, by design, not the armed forces of China. It is the armed forces of the Chinese Communist Party, which holds the leadership roles within China. In fact, the Central Military Commission which leads the

Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2008), 214.

¹⁷³ Cheung, *China's Entrepreneurial Army*, 184.

PLA is a “body directly derived from the Central Committee.”¹⁷⁴ This distinction could not be more important when it comes to internal politics and loyalties within China.

Following Tiananmen Square in 1989, many American academics suggested that the event would mark the separation of the PLA from the party; the PLA would exist in a more symbiotic relationship than a directly subordinated role.¹⁷⁵ This prediction proved to be flat out incorrect even in the years that followed. In each real world test, the PLA proved to be loyal to the party and subordinated its ultimate aims to the direction of the party leadership. The removal of the PLA businesses at the turn of the millennium even further solidified the control of the PLA by the Communist Party by controlling the purse strings completely. The money was used as a means to tighten the reins of control even further.

Tai Ming Cheung, the author of a very thorough book on the PLA business forays concluded that “the negative consequences of the PLA’s involvement in business have more than outweighed the benefits that commercialism has had on military professionalism and combat readiness.”¹⁷⁶ There was a true need for additional funding to jump-start China in the mid-1980s and the world security situation had allowed this. The PLA had raised funds through its own businesses to facilitate modernization where possible. Ultimately, the success of the overall nations economy, in part due to reduced

¹⁷⁴ Cordesman, Hess, and Yarosh, *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development*, 50.

¹⁷⁵ For example, see Scobell, “Why the People’s Army Fired on the People: The Chinese Military and Tiananmen,” 207.

¹⁷⁶ Cheung, *China’s Entrepreneurial Army*, 260.

military costs, made the for-profit PLA businesses no longer necessary. The scourge of this stop-gap measure to include reduced combat effectiveness and wide-spread corruption was no longer acceptable to the modern China. Accordingly, the PLA for-profit ventures were effectively ended 15 years after they started to expand, changing the experiences of all members of the PLA.

PLA Downsizing - PLAN Expanding

The overall PLA was downsized again, with the dominant reductions being in the army portion of the PLA in 1997 and another more minor reduction in 2003. Figure 9 provides a graph of PLA total manpower from 1981 to 2015 and the percentage of the total force that was PLAN. The information from 1981 to 1999 was previously provided in a graphic in chapter 6 that showed that although the PLA downsized significantly, the PLAN remained a relatively constant 8.5 percent of the total force. This was not the case however in the reductions near the turn of the millennium where the PLAN stayed relatively the same overall size and instead the reductions were largely taken from the army. As an example, the PLAN in 1995 was approximately 260,000 personnel and the PLA (army) was 2.3 million. By 2005 however, the PLAN was a robust 255,000 with the PLA (army) reduced to 1.6 million. The reductions were intentionally done in this manner. The 2006 Defense White Paper noted that the “proportion of the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery Force in the PLA had been raised by 3.8 percent while that of the Army has been lowered by 1.5 percent.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ The Information Office of the State Council, “China’s National Defense in 2006” (The Information Office of the State Council, December 2006), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/book/194482.htm>.

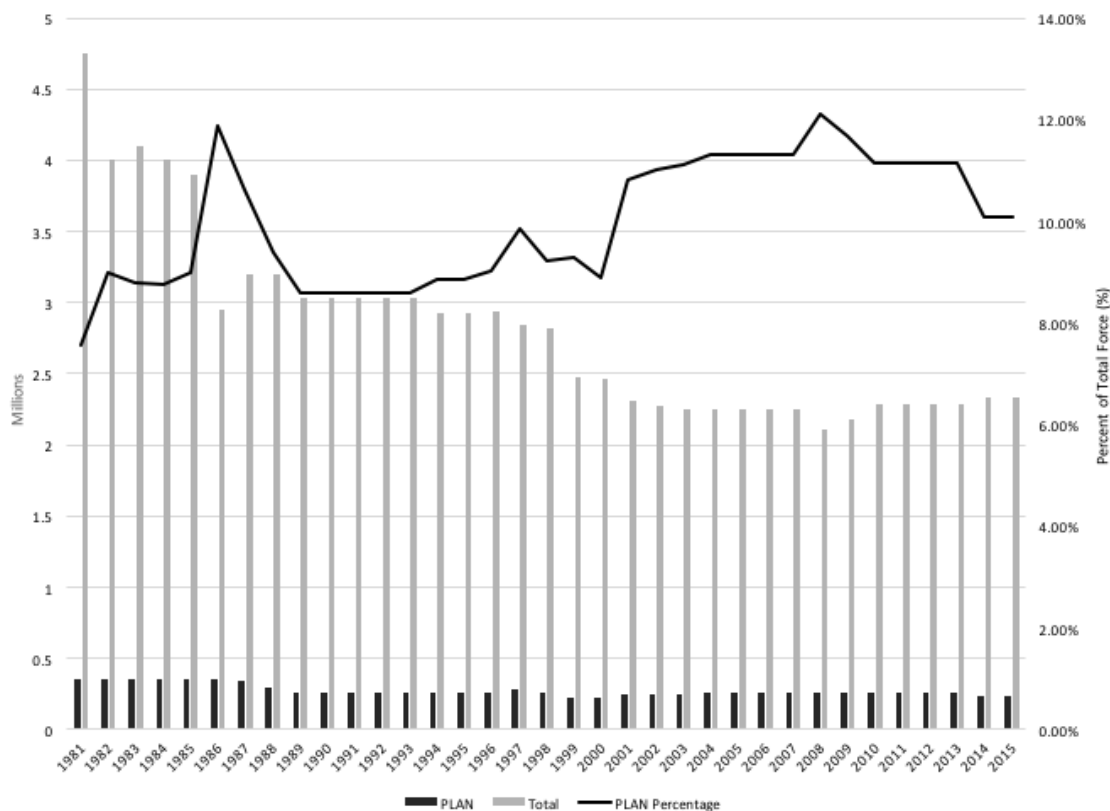


Figure 9. PLAN Proportion of Total PLA Force Rises

Source: Graphic created by author. Data from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies 1981-2015).

These figures help point to the rising prominence of the Navy within the PLA. Bernard Cole, possibly the most published PLAN expert, noted that “although the PLAN remains the smallest of China’s conventional armed services, it may be exerting influence in PLA policy determination out of proportion to its size.”¹⁷⁸ This change in perspective to a more premier and important service has impacts on recruitment. As a young technically inclined officer candidate, the Navy is clearly a viable career path that will

¹⁷⁸ Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 58.

not be forced to play second fiddle. This author commissioned in the United States Navy as a young electrical engineer due to the combination of it being a technically demanding service and its international role. It is therefore experientially clear to this author that as the role of the PLAN increases in China, and it advances its technical prowess, it will naturally recruit a different group of candidates than the hardline academy only pipeline of the past.

One-Child Policy Officers

The notorious one-child policy within China took effect in 1979. Although one-child conscripts started serving in the PLA in 1996, one-child officers within the PLA would start to arrive in noticeable numbers at the turn of the millennium.¹⁷⁹ All officers entering the PLAN since 2000 have been impacted by the one-child policy at the very least in their social and family relationships. Quantifying exactly what the impacts of this change are in military aptitude is difficult but internal PLA surveys shed a broad qualitative view. Officers from one-child families were found to be better educated, competitive, and open to self-improvement. At the same time, they were found to be generally more liberal; several even had negative remarks as to the current system of political control within the PLA. Furthermore, one-child officers had lower retention rates than those officers with siblings.¹⁸⁰ Although the one-child policy was implemented far before the turn of the millennium, the impacts of it were not felt notably within the

¹⁷⁹ 20.6 percent of Chinese forces by 1996 were one-child soldiers. 42.5 percent by 1998. Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 282.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 283.

PLA until the rise of this social generation to service age. Several key things affect the one-child officers that is distinct from the previous generations.

First, the social structure of China is such that financial security for a parent resides in their children. The government has attempted to mitigate this through subsidies for parents with either “one child or two daughters” but they are considered by many to be “too small for rural parents to risk the death of their only child.”¹⁸¹ The enticements have expanded over the years to include government advertised inflating of postgraduate admissions test scores for those who choose to serve in the PLA.¹⁸² Needless to say, the risk inherent in military service is uniquely elevated for a family when the retirement system is nested in a single child and their long-term economic viability. Accordingly, many of those who choose to join are from families that are constrained financially or where the PLA provides a possible means to elevate their status within the Party.

The impacts of the one-child policy go beyond the recruitment of personnel into the PLA. It also impacts what their experiences were in their upbringing and who they are as people. A recent and statistically significant analytical study was completed to measure the “behavioral impacts of China’s one-child policy” for the journal *Science*

¹⁸¹ “Easing Family Policy to Ensure Military Recruits,” *People’s Daily*, April 28, 2015, <https://lumen.cgsccl.com/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.lumen.cgsccl.com/docview/1676060264?accountid=28992>.

¹⁸² Zhao Lei and Cang Wei, “PLA Eases Standards for Recruitment,” *China Daily*, June 17, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/17/content_17592098.htm.

which demonstrated significant changes for those born after the policy was in effect.¹⁸³ Specifically, there was a notable reduction in altruism, trust, trustworthiness, risk-taking, and competitiveness.¹⁸⁴ All of these are traits that are sought out in a modern international military, especially its officer corps. The decline of these habits in society broadly has implications in both the expected actions and reactions to various situations. The influx of the One-Child Policy children into the PLA, which occurred at the turn of the millennium, has had an impact on the mentality of the incoming personnel.

Although not directly related to PLAN officers, unless they commission following enlisted service, the length of conscription was changed in 2000 to only two years from three years in the PLA and four years in the Navy or Air Force.¹⁸⁵ This is presented less as an impact on the PLAN officer corps than it is as a further indication that the effects of the one-child policy and the overriding desire of many in China to return to the civilian workforce as soon as possible. The prospects for financial gain are simply greater and their lives are more reliable outside the PLA, especially when so much is riding on their financial success.

The One-Child Policy has had wide-reaching implications on the PLA. From the changes in the type of person who chooses to enter the officer corps through to their behavior as a product of a no-sibling family, they are a different pool of people than their

¹⁸³ Lisa Cameron et al., “Little Emperors: Behavioral Impacts of China’s One-Child Policy,” *Science* 339 (February 22, 2013): 953-57.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 955.

¹⁸⁵ Allen and Clemens, *The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel*, 1, 15-16.

predecessors. There are some indications as to how they think and act differently, but how that translates into action is yet to be seen. We can however recognize that the entry of the One-Child Policy children, extremely rapidly, has had an impact on the PLAN officer corps and supports that the turn of the millennium was a generational change.

National Defense Student Program

PLA officers historically had been the product of the PLA academies which provided a combination of academic, military, and political instruction. It is important to note when thinking of a military academy in China, it does not have exact parallels to United States academies; several do not have bachelors degree programs and instead provide “three-year senior technical (associate’s) degrees.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, there were 30 PLA academies in 2006 which significantly outnumbers the number of United States federally run military academies.¹⁸⁷ In 1998 however, there was a shift towards a Reserve Officer Training Corps style program that allowed prospective officers to attend civilian universities while conducting part-time military training during their time in school.¹⁸⁸ This program is referred to as the National Defense Student program.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸⁷ John F. Corbett, Edward C. O’Down, and David D. Chen, “Building the Fighting Strength: PLA Officer Accession, Education, Training, and Utilization,” in *The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2008), 142.

¹⁸⁸ Allen and Clemens, *The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel*, 7; Note: Blasko states that the program was officially established in May 2000

The National Defense Student program was created due to the Chinese leadership questioning the educational rigor within the PLA academies and wanting to leverage the expanding and highly capable domestic universities. By providing education scholarships to some of the most elite universities in China, this has allowed the PLA to recruit higher quality officers. As an example, “200 students competed for slots in the National Defense Student Program at East China Jiaotong University in 2006; the program accepted 20 freshmen.”¹⁸⁹ The increased competition certainly has provided increased talent, particularly those that are technical. It is important to note that the students are evaluated not just on their academics and physical condition, as typical of most Western nations. The National Defense Student candidates also receive a political evaluation.¹⁹⁰

With such apparent selection rigor, it appears that the PLA units which receive the officers have found troubling trends. Specific to National Defense Students, units have said that “they are not physically strong,” “they find it difficult to communicate with fellow soldiers,” “they do not find it easy to accept criticism,” “they are not sufficiently interested in politics,” and “they do not have a strong sense of group solidarity and the willingness to sacrifice for the group.”¹⁹¹ It is impossible to quantitatively analyze these

and the earlier date was early testing of the concept. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, 58.

¹⁸⁹ Corbett, O’Down, and Chen, “Building the Fighting Strength,” 148.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 161. Note, the source incorrectly references endnote 62. The correct endnote for this section is 67 in that work.

impressions with the lack of PLA published material, but they appear to be the widely accepted in domestic opinion pieces and Western analysis.

The rate in which the National Defense Student program was expanded was significant. Whereas there were no National Defense Student university programs in early 1998, over 60 existed by 2002.¹⁹² The specific percentage of the PLAN officer corps accessions, or even the PLA for that matter, from the National Defense Student program is simply not published. This author's best guess based on the plethora of estimates of other authors is that National Defense Students are between 35 percent to 50 percent of each officer corps year group.¹⁹³ Even if it is actually on the higher end or lower end of the spectrum, it is clear that is a significant portion and that it emerged over only a handful of years at the turn of the millennium. Therefore, the generation of PLAN officers that commissioned during this generation were either from the newly formed National Defense Student program or served with peers in uniform that had. Certainly the inculcation of the National Defense Students and their experiences would affect the social dynamics of anyone entering to PLA.

Changing Maritime Role

Increased Regional Role and Capability

The PLAN's role in China's international power started to expand greatly at the turn of the millennium as well. This change from what is often coined a "brown water"

¹⁹² Ibid., 148.

¹⁹³ One estimate was as high as 60 percent for the PLAN specifically. See Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, 123; For a lower estimate of approximately one-third, see Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, 58.

navy to a traditional great power “blue water” navy is perhaps the most exhaustively discussed of all changes in this chapter. It is important to acknowledge there has been a transition in the mentality of PLAN officers as a result of this and will certainly impact their perspective on the world. The political impacts of this change internationally is not the salient point, the impacts on the young PLAN officers however is.

Most academics point to Admiral Liu Huaqing, who led the PLAN from 1982 to 1987, as the proponent for the change in China.¹⁹⁴ As with any major change, although he made significant changes in direction at the top, it would not be until the turn of the millennium before the change in direction started to take root in physical ship deliveries and doctrine. As the primary focus of this thesis is those PLAN officers in their formative experiences, high level planning which does not transcend the ranks into real experience is only tangentially important. By 2000 however, it was clear that a change from the earlier peoples war at sea was in progress to what has been coined a “near-seas defense” strategy that would confront opposing forces further out at sea.¹⁹⁵ Both the new “near-seas defense” and its predecessor which carried for formal title of “active defense” have a nominally defensive maritime capability that can reach out to strike an enemy with offensive capability when the situation presents itself. The difference is that the region

¹⁹⁴ Martin N. Murphy and Toshi Yoshihara, “Fighting the Naval Hegemon: Evolution in French, Soviet, and Chinese Naval Thought,” *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 30.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 30-31.

expected to be defended had shifted from the Chinese mainland to the entire region—hence the term “near-seas.”

This change in the defensive scope is demonstrated materially by China’s willingness to bankroll the significant modernization and construction to underwrite it. For example, between 2000 and the the present, 2016, China has increased the number of its modern attack submarines from 5 to 41.¹⁹⁶ As a comparison, the United States Navy has 53 attack submarines presently with an expected reduction to 41 in fiscal year 2029.¹⁹⁷ China even obtained its first aircraft carrier, albeit in unfinished condition and a former Soviet design, in 1998.¹⁹⁸ Negating the intended purposes of these platforms, and the ultimate nature of their reportedly capable weapon systems, it is clear that the experiences of a PLAN officer that commissioned in 2005 is different than of 1990 in terms of platforms and expected capabilities in a conventional fight.

Doctrinal Expectations of the PLAN

There is a lively and seemingly endless debate about which notable maritime theorist or school of thought is the most dominant within China now and even in the past.

¹⁹⁶ Ronald O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 16; Concept for evaluating submarine increase from Murphy and Yoshihara, “Fighting the Naval Hegemon,” 32. Data was updated to 2016 data from 2012 and a comparison to the US added for context.

¹⁹⁷ Ronald O’Rourke, *Navy Virginia (SSN-774) Class Attack Submarine Procurement: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 10.

¹⁹⁸ O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, 18.

Realistically, pinning the overall strategy of the early PLAN on any particular one would be a gross over simplification. The most convincing argument is a hybrid one: that the Chinese Naval strategy of the past was a Soviet Young School model, which has some origins in the French Jeune École, that was intertwined with a strong people's revolutionary war overtone.¹⁹⁹ Essentially by using speed, mass, and surprise, a weaker Naval Force could deny an opponent full sea control and act as a harassing force within its area of operation. There is no real attempt to maintain the safety of one's own sea lines of communication as this strategy is inherently defensive and designed for a nation that is land strong but sea weak. Note, the land strong force must also be economically strong by its land ties as well for long term viability.²⁰⁰ This is exactly the conditions of China as it exited its Civil War in 1949.

As the economic power of China rose however, the sea lines of communication could no longer be ignored as they were critical to national power. The previous concept of defense with very limited striking capability was no longer appropriate. The 2004 Defense White Paper "evaluated China's surroundings in terms reminiscent of Mahan."²⁰¹ Simply put, China has retained its defensive concept at least outwardly but

¹⁹⁹ Murphy and Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon," 13-28.

²⁰⁰ Napoleon's continental system is an example of a large nation with a weak naval force surrendering its sea lines of communications and attempting the nations trade by land only. There are many cases of this not succeeding where the subject nation was previously dependent on significant seaborne commerce, such as Germany in the First World War.

²⁰¹ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century: The Turn to Mahan* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 72.

now recognizes their sea lines of communication as part of that requiring defense.

Overlaying Mahan onto the Chinese ship-building figures is also an over simplification that belies the cultural and historical difference involved. The Chinese “view of the sea . . . is essentially territorial and consequently alien to the Anglo-American understanding of naval warfare.”²⁰² If China sees its sea lines of communication as critical and requiring defense, it will not necessarily take on the amorphous shape of large scale mobile fleets seeking decisive battle as expected of a Mahan based strategy.

Just as it is difficult to exactly describe the current direction of Chinese Naval strategy, it is difficult to determine exactly what the impact of these changes are upon the PLAN officers. We can recognize that they are now required to envision an operating area beyond the immediate seas. This includes the counter piracy missions off the coast of Africa which is inherently an offensive force, although for a notionally defensive purpose to the sea lines of communication. It also includes an increased regional role to include operations into the Western Pacific with a ever rising tempo and scale.²⁰³ The saying in the United States is that if a person wanted to see the world, they need only join the navy. Joining the PLAN of only a few decades ago would almost never have resulted in a foreign port visit, but that has now changed.

²⁰² Murphy and Yoshihara, “Fighting the Naval Hegemon,” 35.

²⁰³ Christopher H. Sharman, *China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 13-27. Major PLAN deployments and the presumed purposes of them since 2004 are covered in this work.

Conclusion

The turn of the millennium was a generational shift in the PLAN officer corps. Many of the changes were the product of changes started decades earlier, such as the one-child policy, that came to fruition. The market based reforms that Deng Xiaoping initiated in the 1980s had been wildly successful and negated the original intent of the PLA for profit companies. Corruption and political control were far more important in the newly flush Chinese state economy. Access to the new international markets required the use of the maritime commons and forced a doctrinal change to operating in larger swaths of sea. The highly informationalized and weapons system based nature of modern warfare had mandated a new and more technologically capable PLA officer. Turning to their universities, the PLA officer ranks were no longer the product of just the academies. The National Defense Student program changed the formative experiences of the PLA officers either directly or indirectly due to the sheer quality and rate of change.

Blasko, writing in 2006, argued that “more change has been visible [in the PLA] since the year 1999 than in the previous two decades.”²⁰⁴ It is clear that a change in direction occurred at the turn of the millennium and it appears for the most part the PLA of today is just a continuation of that which commissioned in 2000. Viewing contemporary issues from a long-term view, no significant events have occurred since 2000 which would fundamentally change the nature of a PLAN officer since that shift. Accordingly, defining the exact end date of this generation is not yet possible. There are some indications that another change is on the horizon or already in progress, but

²⁰⁴ Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, 183-184.

defining it at this time would be predicated on mostly conjecture. Accordingly, this chapter concludes with the following: a generational change occurred in the PLAN officer accessions around the year 2000 and that generation has continued to the present.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

Recapitulation of Previous Chapters

Each chapter of this thesis was an integral building block for answering the research questions. Figure 10, provided below, is the same figure provided in the thesis introduction and illustrates the flow of information that was presented. The following section of this final chapter will briefly review each of the preceding chapters conclusions to allow the research questions to be answered in the subsequent section.

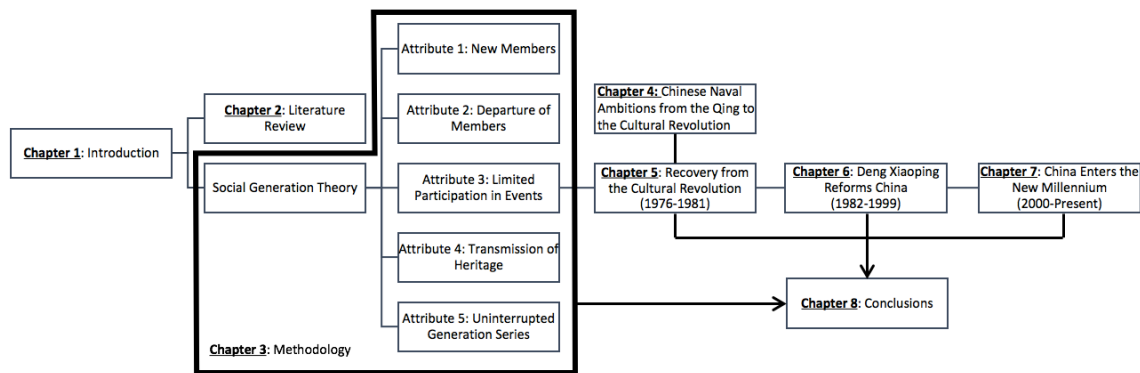


Figure 10. Thesis Structure Review

Source: Created by author.

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the topic of PLAN officers and the contemporary value of studying their life experiences. Three research questions were identified that were used throughout the remainder of the thesis as a means to further explore if PLAN officers could be differentiated into social generations based on their

approximate date of entry into the PLA. The second chapter transitioned to broad discussions of the current literature on China, the PLA, the PLAN, and those niche works that address PLAN social generations directly. The literature review concluded that few works are focused on the broad experiences of PLAN officers; social generation works that address China are limited to the most elevated of ranks when they do exist.

The third chapter focused on social generation theory as presented by Karl Mannheim in his seminal work on generations. Five attributes from the work were extracted and each were shown to be present in the current PLAN officer corps. One of these attributes required a more detailed analysis to provide usable information and acted as the locus of this thesis: “Members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally limited section of the historical process.”²⁰⁵ Necessarily a review of Chinese history, focused on those events which impacted the PLAN officer corps, was required to identify the points of transition where the historical events were of such importance that the experience of a PLAN officer that would enter after it (and therefore not experience the conditions of before it) was notable.

To establish historical context of the current PLAN officer corps, which has largely entered the PLA after 1976 with rare exception, chapter 4 discussed the major events in China and those that impacted the Chinese Navy from the fall of the Qing Dynasty to the end of the Cultural Revolution. This chapter did not attempt to distinguish any social generations during this period as it was outside the scope of the thesis and, as

²⁰⁵ Mannheim, *Essays on the Knowledge of Sociology of Knowledge*, 296-299.

illustrated in chapter 2, has been discussed in other works published in the 1970s. It served as a historical foundation only.

Chapter 5 presented a series of key events and changes that occurred immediately after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Sometimes referred to in the chapter as an interregnum period, those that entered the PLAN between 1976 and 1981 were subject to significant political and social change. A young PLAN officer entering in early 1976 experienced a communist economy, a strictly peasant focused ideology emboldened by the Cultural Revolution, and an education system that was truly Red and not expert. The same person that would enter in early 1982 however would experience an economy that was undergoing significant market-based reforms, a more moderate ideological interpretation of communism, and a mandate for officers to be educated and in many cases technical experts.

The second social generation, presented in chapter 6 as between 1982 and 1999, addressed the impacts of Deng's ascendancy to power and how his vision of China impacted the PLAN. The extreme change experienced by those during the interregnum period was no longer, but the impacts of the changes had now started to take hold. The burgeoning Chinese economy demanded significant government spending which was reallocated from the PLA. The poor performance in the Sino-Vietnamese War allowed Deng to conduct a significant downsizing of the PLA while demanding professionalization of the PLA. At the same time, the PLA was allowed to create its own businesses to raise its own money which caused corruption reduced combat effectiveness of the force.

The changes that were in full force by 1982 had reached their zenith by 1999 when the second and third order effects, when combined with domestic and international changes, mandated another change in direction. As presented in chapter 7, the turn of the millennium introduced a series of changes that again altered the experiences of new PLAN officers notably. The businesses that had aided in the rise of the Chinese economy were curbed and the PLA was directed to focus on its combat role with the government footing the entirety of the expense.

The turn of the millennium also saw significant changes in the personnel in the PLAN officer corps. The PLA was downsized again, but the PLAN was largely maintained in overall size this time which allowed its percentage of the total PLA to rise from about 8.5 percent to 11 percent. The One-Child Policy introduced in 1979 had now started to fill the PLAN ranks for the first time with people who had no siblings which had personal and social impacts. Furthermore, in an effort to recruit a more educated officer, the PLA turned to the National Defense Student Program to bring in officers from large universities instead of exclusively the military academies. Finally, the PLAN was now undergoing significant modernization to push out further to sea to compete regionally.

Three Social Generations in the Current PLAN

As discussed in the conclusions of chapters 5, 6, and 7, the experiences of a PLAN officer during each of the periods (1976 to 1981, 1982 to 1999, and 2000 to the present) was different. By using Karl Mannheim's theory that a person's experiences in their formative years, which is approximately an officer's period of entry into the PLAN officer corps, is the most critical - this thesis argued that those entering the PLAN during

each specified period were members of separate generations. The five attributes required for a social generation have now been shown to exist and now allows the research questions to be directly addressed.

Primary Research Question: Do social generations exist within the current PLAN officer corps?

Three social generations exist within the current PLAN officer's corps that can be differentiated by the approximate date of entry into the PLAN. Table 3 provides a summary of major events that impacted the experiences a PLAN officer during their formative years. The demarcation points between the three generations was deduced using Karl Mannheim's social generation construct that focused on five key elements required for a social generation to exist. These dates also correspond approximately to other Chinese social generation works conclusions, further reinforcing the dates presented in this thesis. Appendix A provides a cross-literature comparison chart of social generation works related to China during the subject period of 1976 to the present.

Table 3. PLAN Social Generation Major Event Conclusions

	China	PLA	PLAN
Gen. 1 1976-1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of Cultural Revolution • Interregnum Period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PME Restoration Started • Poor Performance in Sino-Vietnamese War 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red to Expert (PLAN)
Gen. 2 1982-1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn to Market Based Economy • Deng's Rise to Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red to Expert • PLA Downsizes • PLA Budget Shrinks • Professionalization of the PLA • Risk of War Low • PLA Businesses Expand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuclear Weapons Role for PLAN
Gen. 3 2000-Now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-Child Policy Children Enter Workforce • Major International Economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLA Businesses Curbed • PLA Downsized • National Defense Program Started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAN Role in China Increases • Maritime Role Expands to Blue Water

Source: Created by author.

Secondary Research Question One: What events are specific to PLAN officers that impact their generation in comparison to the PLA or China as a whole?

Each of the events in table 3 are marked to indicate if the event is as broad as impacting all of China, the PLA, or specific to the PLAN. This table is formatted such that a person looking broadly at PLA officers (not service specific) would use the first two columns to identify those events that were applicable and ignore those parts specific to the PLAN. If a subsequent author was to create a work looking at the PLA Air Force instead, the first two columns would be expected to match, but differentiate in the third

column for those events that were Air Force specific. Each bullet is explained in detail within the respective generation's chapter.

Secondary Research Question Two: How have these differences
been received and resolved when applicable?

This secondary question was extremely challenging to address both in the available material and in the writing of the thesis. Friction within the PLA is not something presented in any official Chinese document this author has seen. Even the Chinese media pieces were very brief and superficial in discussing any differences. Several examples of the differences were provided in chapters 5, 6, and 7 such as the sub-par evaluation of National Defense Students performance. This void of published information would lead a casual observer to consider that the differences are not significant. In fact, removing this line of secondary research was considered at several points by this author.

However, the conclusions of several Western authors who have interacted with PLA officers has indicated that the differences are very real but often suppressed below the surface. Almost all of these conclusions have anonymous senior PLA officers as their footnoted source. This author has had the opportunity to speak to both United States and foreign officers who have interacted with the PLA over the past year at the Command and General Staff College. After identifying this authors area of thesis research, most casually provided an experience that supported generational differences being present. These ranged from perceived changes by the observer when interacting with PLA officers when senior PLA officers were present or not through to direct two way conversations on the topic. This author is convinced a difference is present, but the bulk of the data may

only reside in discussions on closed social media sites such as Weibo and are inaccessible to an outside Western researcher.

By no means does this brief discussion resolve this secondary research question, but the discussion is important to have. With the rising role of China on the international stage, it is clear to me why most officers would be unwilling to go on the record discussing possible disagreements within the PLAN. The anonymous PLA officer footnotes of most Western books are clearly a product of the same dilemma this author faced when considering formal interviews to address this secondary question directly with citable sources. Therefore, this author is forced to provide no solid conclusions on the generational differences impacts other than they are believed to be present and below the surface.

Areas of Future Research and Closing Remarks

Several areas were not addressed in thesis that warrant additional research by those who specialize in PLAN officers. Addressing these additional topics was greatly desired by this author at the outset of this thesis work, but would have resulted in a document far greater in size and was not realistic in the available time. Therefore, the following research questions are recommended for future research: Are we on the cusp of another social generational change in the PLAN officer corps? Can the future policy of a PLAN officer social generation, as it rises to be the elite generation, be predicted based on its formative experiences? Are there significant social generation differences between the different services in the PLA that entered in the same date range and what does this imply for future joint operations? Finally, as discussed earlier, providing a detailed discussion with citable sources to address one of this thesis's secondary research

questions: How have social generation differences been received and resolved when applicable?

This author commends the PLA as a topic for any researcher but warns that the amount of far reaching knowledge to even start to understand China is significant. The extremely tumultuous last century has ranged from a now defunct Qing Dynasty to a rising international superpower. Looking at singular issues with a narrow focus, such as only the South China Sea, does not require a researcher to fully dive into the background of these issues and the cultural origins of the conflict which are often very important. Dozens of books and countless journal articles were read by this author in areas far outside the research focus of this thesis to gain what can be perceived as only the most basic of understanding. This author even participated in a Defense Language Institute Chinese Familiarization Course led by a Chinese national which only served as a daily reminder of the magnitude of knowledge required to speak authoritatively on China.

To close, researching the PLAN has been extremely valuable and firmly challenging. This author is convinced more than ever that the first step is to understand the Chinese people before addressing their resultant actions. In the final days of editing this paper, this author was fortunate enough to witness a conversation between an apparently well educated Chinese couple on vacation and a Command and General Staff College instructor at the Nelson Atkins Museum. The discussion focused on the South China Sea, one of the most common topics of the present and why there is such disagreement.

Although the discussion was cordial, it was clear that there simply was too different of a perception of each others history and culture. The starting point of world

values was so different that they effectively were talking past each other. As this author appeared to be reading labels on the nearby art, but was actually listening intently, the thought of Rear Admiral Richard O’Kane’s discussion with the Japanese destroyer captain during World War Two kept creeping forth. The fundamental lack of mutual understanding on topics such as what can or can’t be owned let alone military history was negating any attempts at logic or meaningful debate by either side. The brief discussion observed left this author both satisfied that a research focus on the people of China is important while also profoundly concerned about the potential for a significant flare up between the rising China and the United States.

Works Published During Final Editing of this Thesis

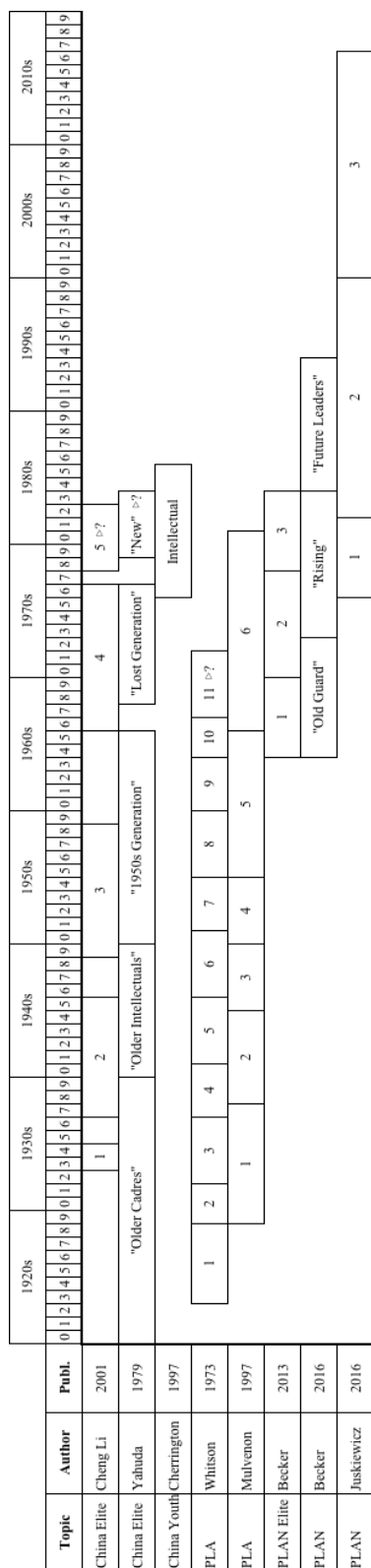
During the final editing and review of this thesis in the lead up to its defense, a journal article by Jeffrey Becker was published in the Navy War College Review that addressed social generations in the current and upcoming PLAN leadership. As this thesis was effectively complete by the time this thesis author read the piece in the Spring 2016 edition of the Navy War College Review, it was determined to maintain the thesis as is and briefly acknowledge the newly published work. The content of this thesis was generated in complete isolation from the article, but the two works are largely in agreement on key events for those generations that overlap. The Naval War College Review’s audience is slightly different than that of this thesis which is more academic than pragmatic; social generation theory and social science is largely omitted from Becker’s newest work. This author believes that the article reinforces the conclusions of this thesis and stands by the material herein after several reviews of the newly published work.

APPENDIX A

GRAPHIC SUMMARY OF SOCIAL GENERATION WORKS

The following graphic represents the culmination of all social generation works known by this author that overlap the subject time period of 1976 to the present and address generations within the PLA or PLAN. The 2016 work by Jeffrey Becker that is acknowledged in the conclusion chapter to ensure this takeaway appendix is the most complete possible for any future academic in this area. Some liberties had to be taken in the graphic due to date ranges provided that are not precise and did not easily convert to an easy to follow chart. As an example, Jeffrey Becker refers to the “PLAN’s Rising Cohort” as having “joined the PLA in the middle-to-late 1970s or early 1980s.”²⁰⁶ This was converted to a band of 1973 to 1983 graphically. Whitson defined his transitions to the exact month of a given year, but this focus was too narrow to be graphically represented and was therefore rounded to the nearest year. This author accepts the responsibility for any errors or misinterpretations of an original authors intent in generating this graphic.

²⁰⁶ Jeffrey Becker, “Who’s at the Helm?: The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China’s Navy,” *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 77.



Chinese PLA Social Generations Across Existing Works

Source: Graphic created by author. Content derived from: Jeffrey Becker, “Who’s at the Helm?: The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China’s Navy,” *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 66–90; Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China’s Navy* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2013); Ruth Cherrington, “Generational Issues in China: A Case Study of the 1980s Generation of Young Intellectuals,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (June 1997): 302–20; Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001); James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications* (Washington, DC: RAND, 1997); William Wallace Whitson and Chen-hsia Huang, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927–71* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Michael Yahuda, “Political Generations in China,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 80 (December 1979): 793–805.

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